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ABSTRACT

This unit is intended to provide students with an understanding of India in 1997 by drawing on some of the major cultural, political, intellectual, and economic themes of its recent history. This snapshot of India uses the 50th anniversary as the occasion to evaluate the path modern India has taken. The unit examines the country's reactions to internal and external pressures for change. The final project asks students to plan for India's next 50 years. Sections of the unit include: (1) "Intellectual Overview"; (2) "India, 1997"; (3) "Unity and Diversity"; (4) "Traditional Culture"; and (5) "Final Project." (EH)

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by

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Curricular Project
India and Her Ethos – Summer 1997
By John Schafer

INDIA AT 50

The purpose of this teaching unit is to foster a good understanding of India in 1997 by drawing on some major cultural, political, intellectual, and economic themes of its recent history. This snapshot look at India today – using the 50th anniversary as the occasion to evaluate the path modern India has taken – will look at the country's reactions to pressures – internal and external – for change. The final project will be to chart or plan for India's next 50 years.

I Intellectual Overview

Assignments:

Read "Tagore and His India"
"Gandhi and Nehru: Frustrated Visionaries"

Classroom discussions and projects:

Look up basic demographic facts: popular, diversity of languages, religions, political conditions
Write a paragraph for each Nehru, Gandhi, and Tagore that explains their vision for modern India

II India, 1997

Assignments:

Read "India's 5 Decades of Progress and Pain"
"Making Sense of India"

Classroom discussions and projects:

Discuss India-Pakistan partition, show film clip from "Gandhi" on communal violence, have a student read a chapter from *Freedom At Midnight* and present to the class, have a student do outside reading on the on-going Kashmir conflict and present to the class.
Discuss how would Tagore, Gandhi, and Nehru assess the last 50 years. What would they cite as accomplishments, as deficiencies?

Discuss how would you evaluate the last 50 years? (use chart from "India's 5 Decades"

III Unity and Diversity

Assignments:

Read "India's Odd, Enduring Patchwork"
"Awakening of the Shudras"
"Growth of violence has been phenomenal"
"Subaltern Politics"
"The Bombay Rush"

Classroom discussions and projects:

Brief lecture on the political situation
Have a student do extra reading and lead a discussion of the caste system
Define "modernization" socially, economically, politically, and culturally
Define India's traditional culture. Discuss to what extent are Western notions of democracy and capitalism appropriate for 1997 India?
Discuss is India's diversity an asset or a liability in its modernization effort?
Discuss how is multicultural India like and not like other multi-ethnic nations we have studied: Bosnia, the former USSR?

IV Traditional Culture

Assignments:

Read "MTV Age Dawning in India"
"MBA plus MTV: India's Yuppies Lead a Revolution"
"India's Lewd Awakening: MTV & the Film Industry Are Putting Sexy Lyrics on Everyone's Lips"
"On Ganges Plain, Modernity Is Straining Tradition"
"Early to Wed: Still Common in Rural India, Child Weddings Highlight Clash Between Tradition and Today"
"Changing India, Wedded to Tradition: Arranged Marriages Persist With 90s Twists"

Classroom discussions and projects:

Discuss: these are stories from the Western media, are they fair?
Write an essay, if you were a leader of India, what kind of relationship Would you want with Western investors, the international

community (vis-à-vis Pakistan, given India's desire for a permanent UN Security Council seat), the onslaught of Western popular culture movies, cable tv, and music?

Discuss: what is the future of the caste system, MTV in India, and arranged marriages?

V Final Project

Drawing on the thinking of Tagore, Gandhi, and Nehru, your knowledge of India's last 50 years, and the current trends in globalization – especially economic and cultural, what do you see as the course to set for India's next 50 years. Deal with the pressing social, political, economic, cultural, and diplomatic issues. You paper can take the form of

a memorandum to the prime minister
a speech to be delivered on August 14, 1998
an expository essay
an op-ed written for a Delhi newspaper

History Today Sept 199

Judith Brown assesses the curiou coupling of sage and politician that achieved much – but not all – for Hindu aspirations.

Common goals? Nehru and Gandhi together at the All-India Congress in Bombay, July 1946: but were there inevitable differences in their objectives for a post-Raj India?

GANDHI AND NEHRU
FRUSTRATED VISIONARIES?

The observer of India in 1997 is rightly struck by the immense stability of this, the world's largest democracy, in contrast with her South Asian neighbours and many other new nation states which emerged out of the former British Empire. But equally striking is the great dichotomy between the reality of India at the end of the century and the vision of the new nation offered by its two greatest leaders at the time of independence, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

From 1920 at least, India's growing nationalist movement had stressed through its main organisation, the Indian National Congress, the meaning of independence for the poor and disadvantaged. There was to be a new and more egalitarian society, where the state would have a moral obligation to help the poor and under-privileged and provide opportunities to those who for centuries had been despised and deprived. These ideals were enshrined in the new constitution of 1950, whose preamble committed India to securing for all its citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, and were spelt out in the sections on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of state policy.

Gandhi and Nehru had, in their different ways, spoken constantly of the moral, social and political regeneration of the country as

despite the seminal role of these two leade amongst the greatest visionaries of the p colonial world, after fifty years of democr government and economic developme there is still widespread and desperate p erty in India. With inequalities of status, c sumption and opportunity as great as an the world, the economy, having teetered the edge of international bankruptcy at start of this decade, now moves towards open market policy with little ideolog framework to distinguish it from West economies. Moreover, this secular state ha times been rent by sectarian loyalties and lence, and India's religious minorities rem fearful and often profoundly disadvantag Why has this happened in place of the Ma ma's spiritual vision, and despite Nehru's quent pledge at the moment of independe that India would keep her 'tryst with destir

Gandhi and the younger Nehru were course, very different as people and also their vision of the new India to be create imperial rule ended. A generation separa them, as did social origin and political exp ence. The older man came from a far m provincial and less privileged backgrou had reached professional competence a lawyer by strict personal discipline an regime of self-denial and hard work: an

Africa, where exposure to a wide range of cultural influences and the experience of racial discrimination refined both his political skills and his religious sensibility.

The younger man had been brought up with everything that money could buy, educated at Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge, and inducted with ease into the world of Indian public life by a father who was one of India's most successful and respected lawyers. With an effortless sense of superiority and no experience of hardship or personal challenge, he had no religious beliefs worth the name, and little knowledge of the India of the vast majority of his compatriots. It was little wonder that his father, Motilal, greatly feared what would befall his cosseted son, in personal and material terms, as he came under the influence of the homespun Mahatma.

Yet Gandhi and the somewhat aimless Jawaharlal formed a strong attachment and political partnership which was to last for almost three decades, until Gandhi's assassination in 1948. The attachment was partly personal, founded on mutual attraction between two strong and idiosyncratic personalities. It was partly forged out of mutual need, as both needed the other to further their public aims. To Gandhi, Nehru was the symbol of the younger generation, the heart and touchstone of a younger India whom he needed to weld into the nationalist movement. To Nehru, Gandhi was unique in his ability to sense the mind and mood of the vast numbers of uneducated Indians, and thus essential for the forging of a broad-based nationalist movement to oust the British. But far beyond mutual need the two shared a passionate conviction that India must change radically as independence was won. This was central to the commitment of each man to a public role, and far more than populist rhetoric. Sensing this core of visionary commitment in the other drew them together in a unique way.

Gandhi first worked out his vision of a new India in a small pamphlet published in 1909, entitled *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Home Rule). Here he made plain his belief that true self-rule was far more than mere political independence, or an inheritance of imperial structures of control, but manned by Indians. True *Swaraj* would be founded on a moral revolution of the individual upwards through society as a whole, changing both the pattern of the economy and the nature of political authority. What was needed was a society based on moral individuals who cared for each other and followed spiritual goals, rather than false standards of gain and wealth, imported from the West, along with the means of large-scale production and their potential for the increase of inequality and of violent relations between individuals and ruthless denunciation of 'modern civilisation' and of Western educated Indians who accepted its values. He persisted in defining *swaraj* in moral and social, rather than political language, affirming that its hallmarks would be a more equal society, mutual tolerance between different religious groups, and a commitment to small-scale economic arrangements which put people before gain.

Above all, the hallmark of new Indians would be a commitment to non-violence in all public and private relationships, as the only moral means of achieving true change. For Gandhi non-violence was the only way to follow after what one perceived as truth without endangering the perception of truth held by others: by its very presence and working it would transform attitudes and relationships, and so begin the process of change at the roots of the individuals who formed the bedrock of society. In this vision a modern

Icons of a new dawn: Gandhi and Nehru linked as *patres patriae* in this popular oleograph celebrating independence.

Silver spoons – and wooden ones? Nehru's privileged and Anglicised upbringing (above seen as a Harrow schoolboy) contrasted with Gandhi's more self-made roots as part of a beleaguered Indian minority in South Africa (the photograph below is of him as a young lawyer), which inevitably produced a difference of attitude to the power of élites, the role of the state and a 'small is beautiful' philosophy.

state had little role to play. Gandhi was deeply distrustful of the power of the state, and felt that individual self-control was the only true regulatory power which could change society. At the end of his life he advised Congressmen to disband their party, turn their backs on political power and engage in grass-roots social service.

Gandhi drew his inspiration from aspects of Hindu and other religious traditions, and from a wide range of dissenting voices in Western culture who feared for the spiritual and social implications of industrialisation in Western society. Nehru's vision, by contrast, was generated by his contacts with several variants of Western socialist thinking during his years of education in England and later during his European travels (including a visit to the Soviet Union in 1927), and through his wide reading. Despite his 'alliance' with Gandhi, he made plain the differences in their hopes for India's future, for example, in a series of press articles republished as a pamphlet entitled *Whither India?* (1933) and in his subsequent longer writings, including *An Autobiography* (1936). As he wrote in the former:

> India's immediate goal can . . . only be considered in terms of the ending of exploitation of her people. Politically, it must mean independence and the severance of the British connection. . . economically and socially it must mean the ending of all special class privileges and vested interests. . . The real question before us . . . is one of fundamental change of regime, politically, economically, socially

The means to this end was first a powerful and broadly-based nationalist movement to oust the imperial ruler; and second, a powerful modern state to redistribute resources more equitably and to manage a modern economy. Nehru had little time for Gandhi's commitments to non-violence and to individual moral 'change of heart' as the route to truly radical change; and he had no sympathy with the Mahatma's religious language and priorities, aiming instead, in more straightforward political terms, for both a secular state and society.

After India's independence the visions of both men were soon dashed on the rocks of reality. In Gandhi's case this was less surprising. He had always known that few Congressmen had shared his very particular moral viewpoint or sympathised with his broad-ranging plans for the reformation of Indians, their society and polity. When Congressmen had begun to gain significant power at provincial level under successive constitutional reforms, he had lamented that they were behaving like their imperial predecessors; and he spoke with sad realism of the way they left his 'constructive programme' lying littered on the floor at party gatherings.

Gandhi never held high office in Congress either after the Second World War, when it was clear that independence was imminent, or, later, in the new nation state; he recog-

those, like Nehru, who believed in the need for a strong state, both to serve their political ambitions and also to fulfil their genuine hopes for India's economic and social development. After his assassination he was greatly revered: but the only ways in which his vision was even partially enacted was in the legal abolition of the status and practice of untouchability, a gross form of social and ritual discrimination practised against those at the base of Hindu society, and in the encouragement of 'cottage industries' alongside large-scale industrialisation.

Nehru, on the other hand, was India's prime minister without a break from independence until his death in 1964. Yet even his socialist dreams remained unfulfilled. Despite attempts at far-reaching social legislation, he was unable to achieve genuinely radical reform of landholdings on any scale, which would have been a prerequisite for extensive redistribution of resources and abolition of vested interests. He was unable to push through a uniform civil code which would have done much to ameliorate the legal position of women and reduce the entrenched differences between various religious groups. Although there was significant economic development, particularly large-scale industry, planned and partly managed by the state, there was little change in agricultural practices and production, and the incidence of life-threatening poverty, malnutrition and disease remained widespread, making a mockery of the directive principles of the constitution.

Furthermore, India continued to be governed by Nehru in ways which were remarkably similar to those of his imperial predecessors, both in the structure of the state itself despite the universal adult franchise, and in the style of the administrative services which he had once denounced as anti-national and requiring drastic reform. At the end of his life he was, like Gandhi, frustrated at his inability to achieve so much of his life's dreams. On his desk he kept the words of the poet Robert Frost:

> But I have promises to keep,
> And miles to go before I sleep

The reasons for the frustrations of these great visionary leaders lay in part in their different, but unique, pathways into Indian political life. Both were to an extent 'apart from' the ordinary world of Indian professional and business life, or that of the nationalist politician. Gandhi had failed as a lawyer in his native Western India and had achieved professional success and personal maturity in another continent, working among the Indian migrant community. Nehru had been insulated, indeed isolated, by the great wealth of his family and by his prolonged period of education in England. Back home in Allahabad with his family he saw for himself no clear role either in politics or in the profession of the law, for which he was destined. On their return to India both found that the

of Indian politics, and no groups of allies or supporters with whom to make their mark.

Perhaps more importantly, their exposure to the world beyond India had created in each of them a distinctive and idiosyncratic vision of the meaning and nature of 'nationalism' and the Indian nation as they thought it should become. By contrast most of their contemporaries who saw themselves as nationalists thought primarily in terms either of ameliorating British rule and making more room for Indians within the imperial structures of power, or of removing the British altogether. But few thought beyond independence or had visions of radical change grounded in religious belief or a powerful secular ideology as did Gandhi and Nehru.

Their eruption into the politics of nationalism was therefore unpredictable. Gandhi emerged in 1920 as a leader within the Congress because he offered the party a mode of non-violent protest against the British Raj, at a specific juncture in nationalist politics when constitutional politics seemed to have achieved little and when few were willing to resort to the opposite tactic, namely that of violent protest. In the euphoria which followed, Nehru willingly became involved in politics for the first time, sensing that in Gandhi he had met a leader who would address real social and political problems, would lead Indians in fearless resistance to the imperial ruler, and would do away with the parlour politics of an older generation he had so despised. As he wrote in his autobiography of the heady experience of participating in Gandhi's first nation-wide campaign of non-violent non-co-operation with the Raj:

> Many of us who worked for the Congress programme lived in a kind of intoxication during the year 1921. We were full of excitement and optimism and a buoyant enthusiasm. We sensed the happiness of a person crusading for a cause.
>
> Above all, we had a sense of freedom and a pride in that freedom. The old feeling of oppression and frustration was completely gone.

However, the Congress party was never transformed into a band of moral Gandhian enthusiasts, committed to the Mahatma's constructive campaign for the renewal of the nation. Although many Congressmen and many more outside the Party's ranks were attracted by his fearlessness, by his personality and by his Indianness, few accepted his religious vision of man and society, and few were converted to his belief in the rightness and transformative nature of non-violence.

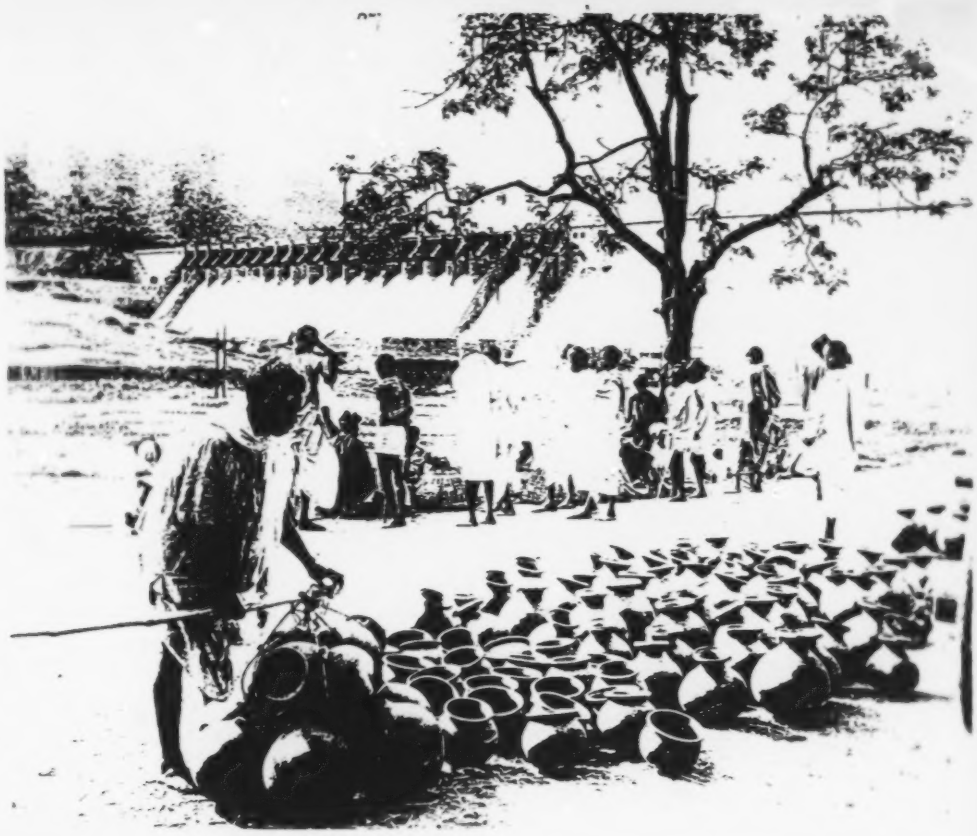
The Congress remained what it had become over the forty years since its inception – a loosely organised association of groups of local men (and a few women), many of high educational and professional background, who were politically active on a full or part time basis, who wished to gain access to the decision-making and executive power of the state which the imperial authority was creating, and who knew that their

Salt of the earth: Gandhi with Congress supporters leaving camp on their march to break the British 'salt laws' monopoly – a focal point of the campaign of Civil disobedience he perfected throughout the 1930s.

the national Congress. It had little full-time and effective party organisation, and depended largely on the co-operative stance of local individuals and groups who used its name – a fact which Gandhi and Nehru both recognised and sort to remedy, because they realised how it reduced the Congress's political effectiveness as a party of direct action or of long-term change.

A further consequence was that Congress had little in the way of a defining and driving ideology, apart from its anti-imperial stance. Ideological compromise was more often the cement which held its members together, particularly as so many of them were comparatively privileged and had social and economic interests to safeguard in the future. Conse-

Affairs of state: Nehru at talks with Khruschev and Bulganin (opposite) in Moscow in 1955 – emblematic of the role Nehru tried to carve out for India as a leader of the non-aligned movement in the 1950s and 60s.



Old and new: this scene of market day in Mayurakshi with its 'Canada Dam' in the background symbolises the tensions between Nehru's post-Independence vision of a modernised India and the continuing reality (and attraction) of Gandhi's peasant society

quently those of its declarations which had a socialist ring were generally little more than vote-catching rhetoric.

In this party Gandhi and Nehru were in their own ways unique, and that uniqueness was both their strength and a long-term weakness in terms of their ability to galvanise Congress into action in pursuit of visionary goals. Gandhi was never a 'leader' in any Western sense of the word. His role from 1920 to the 1940s was more that of an 'expert' on non-violence who could be welcomed and to an extent used by Congress when they felt his particular non-violent strategy of opposition and profoundly moral stance and style suited their purposes: to achieve compromises between different groups within Congress when its internal divisions threatened to rend it apart and destroy the vital unity of the nationalist movement.

Nehru's role was similarly not that of a leader with a natural power base in a locality or in a group of like-minded allies. His 'ticket' in Congress was that of Gandhi's protege and later heir, a fact which at times caused him embarrassment and distress. In the later 1930s his ideological position was so antipathetical to many of the more conservative in Congress that the latter would have made his position in the party impossible if it had not been for Gandhi's presence and watchful eye on the internal dynamics.

As independence became imminent after the end of the Second World War, Congress activists recognised Nehru's skills as a negotiator with the imperial authorities – in part because he spoke their language and had inhabited so much of their mental and p cal world. But even though he became h of the transitional government which sa transfer of power to Indian hands and quently prime minister, Nehru was not s as the party's undisputed leader and logue until some years later.

Although Gandhi lived for a brief peri an independent India, it was Nehru wh to wrestle with the problem of trying to his vision of change under the new cir stances – when Congress had becom party of government rather than of natio rhetoric and protest, and when he was strained by the structure of the state an ability of the administration. For him were a range of seemingly insurmount barriers to the achievement of radical ch One continuing example was the natu the Congress party. Even though he was the early 1950s its undisputed leader though it paid lip service to his vision socialist transformation of society, it wa a party which even more than before pendence represented the interests of who had no wish for radical social and nomic change. Its very success as a natio party had attracted into it many who n access to power. Increasingly it becam party of the businessman, the prosp farmer and the professional, those w stake in the India inherited from the r being made more prosperous for those resources by the actions of an indepe government anxious to boost the econ This rootedness in groups of locally in tial people was its great strength at el

time, but its weakness as an instrument of change. This N[illegible] learned the hard way when it came to attempts at land reform and social legislation for the benefit of the deprived.

Moreover, the very structure of the state inhibited change. Just as in imperial India the country had been administered through provinces, often the size of small European countries, now these became the basis of the States within the Indian Union, bound together in a federation. Consequently on many issues legislation had to pass through the legislatures of the States rather than through the Lok Sabha in New Delhi. As in the case of the abolition of great landlords and the redistribution of land into moderate holdings below a certain 'ceiling', those with vested interests could either get themselves into the State legislature where they could modify or delay reforming measures, or could use the months while legislation was being passed to hire lawyers and so equip themselves to avoid the law. Or in the case of agricultural improvement and the dire need to grow more food, policy implementation was in the hands of the agricultural ministries of the States: and Nehru found it impossible to chivvy them in the way he would have wished. Added to this, the actual tools of government were frustratingly weak and slow.

Independent India inherited an administration structured on an immensely slow bureaucracy, which had made a speciality of generating endless files and pushing them from one level to another with agonising slowness. It was a system where those at lower levels were neither trained nor accustomed to take responsibility and make decisions. At the top it was manned by élite generalists who, though highly educated, were essentially trained to conserve the status quo, to enable the collection of adequate revenue, but not to innovate or manage a social revolution. Nehru as a young nationalist had distrusted and criticised the élite Indian Civil Service, although over half of them were Indian by 1947. He spoke of the need for a total overhaul of the administration and the evolution of a new people-orientated class of administrators. But no administrative revolution occurred, and he found himself increasingly having to rely on the heirs of the service he had castigated, who remained in ethos, background and modes of operation so like their imperial predecessors. It was little wonder that he became increasingly frustrated, and at times bad-tempered, at his inability to 'get things done', despite his own vision and frenetic energy.

The frustrations of the idealisms of India's greatest nationalists, and the pragmatism of the Congress Party, created a profound ideological vacuum in independent India. Into this vacuum have emerged a host of parties in place of the once-great and embracing party which led the country to independence. Many are regional in origin and orientation, fostersubcontinent. But they have proved incapable of making a national appeal or providing the base for a stable all-India coalition. Perhaps the one party which has been able to construct a national vision is the revivalist Hindu Party, the BJP, which has emerged as a highly significant political force over the past decade. But this vision of the nation itself endangers the unity of a nation with many religious minorities and cultural diversities, which Gandhi sort to safeguard with his ethical religion and tolerance, and which Nehru hoped to cement and strengthen with a vision of modern secularism and socialism.

India's politicians need to dream dreams and see visions of a tolerant and compassionate India as their nation's fiftieth birthday is celebrated, for their electorate is telling them sober truths about the lack of repute in which they are held, and their need for integrity and a commitment to real change as the country's expanding population grows increasingly sophisticated and aware of the nature of the political system and its departure from the hopes so manifest in 1947. Gandhi and Nehru may have been frustrated in their hopes for India: but they laid down a marker and a standard by which subsequent leaders and aspirant leaders are judged

FOR FURTHER READING:

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Dynasty at play: Nehru his daughter Indira and grandson Rajiv (both destined to follow him prime minister and die violent deaths) in the garden of their home i New Delhi, October 19

Tagore and His India

New York Review of Books 7/26/97

Amartya Sen

Rabindranath Tagore, who died in 1941 at the age of eighty, is a towering figure in the millennium-old literature of Bengal. Anyone who becomes familiar with this large and flourishing tradition will be impressed by the power of Tagore's presence in Bangladesh and in India. His poetry as well as his novels, short stories, and essays are very widely read, and the songs he composed reverberate around the eastern part of India and throughout Bangladesh.

In contrast, in the rest of the world, especially in Europe and America, the excitement that Tagore's writings created in the early years of this century has largely vanished. The enthusiasm with which his work was once greeted was quite remarkable. *Gitanjali*, a selection of his poetry for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913, was published in English translation in London in March of that year and had been reprinted ten times by November, when the award was announced. But he is not much read now in the West, and already by 1937, Graham Greene was able to say: "As for Rabindranath Tagore, I cannot believe that anyone but Mr. Yeats can still take his poems very seriously."

The contrast between Tagore's commanding presence in Bengali literature and culture and his near-total eclipse in the rest of the world is perhaps less interesting than the distinction between the view of Tagore as a deeply relevant and many-sided contemporary thinker in Bangladesh and India, and his image in the West as a repetitive and remote spiritualist. Graham Greene had, in fact, gone on to explain that he associated Tagore "with what Chesterton calls 'the bright pebbly eyes' of the Theosophists." Certainly, an air of mysticism played some part in the "selling" of Rabindranath Tagore to the West by Yeats, Pound, and his other early champions. Even Anna Akhmatova, one of Tagore's few later admirers (who translated his poems into Russian in the mid-1960s), talks of "that mighty flow of poetry which takes its strength from Hinduism as from the Ganges, and is called Rabindranath Tagore."

Rabindranath did come from a Hindu family—one of the landed gentry who owned estates mostly in what is now Bangladesh. But whatever wisdom there might be in Akhmatova's invoking of Hinduism and the Ganges, it did not prevent the largely Muslim citizens of Bangladesh from having a deep sense of identity with Tagore and his ideas. Nor did it stop the newly independent Bangladesh from choosing one of Tagore's songs ("Amar Sonar Bangla," which means "my golden Bengal") as its national anthem. This must be very confusing to those who see the contemporary world as a "clash of civilizations"—with "the Muslim civilization," "the Hindu civilization," and "the Western civilization," each forcefully confronting the others.

They would also be confused by Rabindranath Tagore's own description of his Bengali family as the product of "a confluence of three cultures, Hindu, Mohammedan and British."[1] Rabindranath's grandfather, Dwarkanath, was well known for his command of Arabic and Persian, and Rabindranath grew up in a family atmosphere in which a deep knowledge of Sanskrit and ancient Hindu texts was combined with an understanding of Islamic traditions as well as Persian literature. It is not so much that Rabindranath tried to produce—or had an interest in producing—a "synthesis" of the different religions (as the great Moghul emperor Akbar tried hard to achieve) as that his outlook was persistently nonsectarian, and his writings—some two hundred books—show the influence of different parts of the Indian cultural background as well as of the rest of the world.[2] Most of his work was written at Santiniketan (Abode of Peace), the small town that grew around the school he founded in Bengal in 1901. He not only conceived

there an imaginative and innovative system of education—to which I will return—but, through his writings and his influence on students and teachers, he was able to use the school as a base from which he could take a major part in India's social, political, and cultural movements.

The profoundly original writer whose elegant prose and magical poetry Bengali readers know well is not the sermonizing spiritual guru admired—and then rejected—in London. Tagore was not only an immensely versatile poet; he was also a great short story writer, novelist, playwright, essayist, and composer of songs, as well as a talented painter whose pictures, with their whimsical mixture of representation and abstraction, are only now beginning to receive the acclaim that they have long deserved. His essays, moreover, ranged over literature, politics, culture, social change, religious beliefs, philosophical analysis, international relations, and much else. The coincidence of the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence with the publication of a selection of Tagore's letters by Cambridge University Press[1] is a good occasion to examine the nature of Tagore's ideas and reflections, and the kind of leadership in thought and understanding he provided in the subcontinent in the first half of this century.

1.

Gandhi and Tagore

Since Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Gandhi were two leading Indian thinkers in this century, many commentators have tried to compare their ideas. On learning of Rabindranath's death, Jawaharlal Nehru, then incarcerated in a British jail in India, wrote in his prison diary for August 7, 1941:

> Gandhi and Tagore. Two types entirely different from each other, and yet both of them typical of India, both in the long line of India's great men.... It is not so much because of any single virtue but because of the *tout ensemble*, that I felt that among the world's great men today Gandhi and Tagore were supreme as human beings. What good fortune for me to have come into close contact with them.

Romain Rolland was fascinated by the contrast between them, and when he completed his book on Gandhi, he wrote to an Indian academic, in March 1923: "I have finished my *Gandhi*, in which I pay tribute to your two great river-like souls, overflowing with divine spirit, Tagore and Gandhi." The following month he recorded in his diary an account of some of the differences between Gandhi and Tagore written by Reverend C.F. Andrews, the English clergyman and public activist who was a close friend of both men (and whose important role in Gandhi's life in South Africa as well as India is well portrayed in Richard Attenborough's film *Gandhi*). Andrews described to Rolland a discussion between Tagore and Gandhi, at which he was present, on subjects that divided them:

> The first subject of discussion was idols; Gandhi defended them, believing the masses incapable of raising themselves immediately to abstract ideas. Tagore cannot bear to see the people eternally treated as a child. Gandhi quoted the great things achieved in Europe by the flag as an idol; Tagore found it easy to object, but Gandhi held his ground, contrasting European flags bearing eagles, etc., with his own, on which he has put a spinning wheel. The second point of discussion was nationalism, which Gandhi defended. He said that one must go through nationalism to reach internationalism, in the same way that one must go through war to reach peace.[2]

Tagore greatly admired Gandhi but he had many disagreements with him on a variety of subjects, including nationalism, patriotism, the importance of cultural exchange, the role of rationality and of science, and the nature of economic and social development. These differences, I shall argue, have a clear and consistent pattern, with Tagore pressing for more room for reasoning, and for a less traditionalist view, a greater interest in the rest of the world, and more respect for science and for objectivity generally.

Rabindranath knew that he could not have given India the political leadership that Gandhi provided, and he was never stingy in his praise for what Gandhi did for the nation (it was, in fact, Tagore who popularized the term "Mahatma"—great soul—as a description of Gandhi). And yet each remained deeply critical of many things that the other stood for. That Mahatma Gandhi has received incomparably more attention outside India and also within much of India itself makes it important to understand "Tagore's side" of the Gandhi–Tagore debates.

In his prison diary, Nehru wrote: "Perhaps it is as well that [Tagore] died now and did not see the many horrors that are likely to descend in increasing measure on the world and on India. He had seen enough and he was infinitely sad and unhappy." Toward the end of his life, Tagore was indeed becoming discouraged about the state of India, especially as its normal burden of problems, such as hunger and poverty, was being supplemented by politically organized incitement to "communal" violence between Hindus and Muslims. This conflict would lead in 1947, six years after Tagore's death, to the widespread killing that took place during partition; but there was much gore already during his declining days. In December 1939 he wrote to his friend Leonard Elmhirst, the English philanthropist and social reformer who had worked closely with him on rural reconstruction in India (and who had gone on to found the Dartington Hall Trust in England and a progressive school at Dartington that explicitly invoked Rabindranath's educational ideals):[3]

> It does not need a defeatist to feel deeply anxious about the future of millions who with all their innate culture and their peaceful traditions are being simultaneously subjected to hunger, disease, exploitations foreign and indigenous, and the seething discontents of communalism.

How would Tagore have viewed the India of today, we may well ask on the fiftieth anniversary of its independence in 1947? Would he see progress there, or wasted opportunity, perhaps even a betrayal of its promise and conviction? And, on a wider subject, how would he react to the spread of cultural separatism in the contemporary world?

2.

East and West

Given the vast range of his creative achievements, perhaps the most astonishing aspect of the image of Tagore in the West is its narrowness; he is recurrently viewed as "the great mystic from the East," an image with a putative message for the West, which some would welcome, others dislike, and still others find deeply boring. To a great extent this Tagore was the West's own creation, part of its tradi-

tion of message-seeking from the East, particularly from India, which—as Hegel put it—had "existed for millennia in the imagination of the Europeans."[6] Friedrich Schlegel, Schelling, Herder, and Schopenhauer were only a few of the thinkers who followed the same pattern. They theorized, at first, that India was the source of superior wisdom. Schopenhauer at one stage even argued that the New Testament "must somehow be of Indian origin: this is attested by its completely Indian ethics, which transforms morals into asceticism, its pessimism, and its avatar," in "the person of Christ." But then they rejected their own theories with great vehemence, sometimes blaming India for not living up to their unfounded expectations.

Tagore and Gandhi, in Santiniketan, 1940

We can imagine that Rabindranath's physical appearance—handsome, bearded, dressed in non-Western clothes—may, to some extent, have encouraged his being seen as a carrier of exotic wisdom. Yasunari Kawabata, the first Japanese Nobel laureate in literature, treasured memories from his middle-school days of "this sage-like poet":

> His white hair flowed softly down both sides of his forehead; the tufts of hair under the temples also were long like two beards, and linking up with the hair on his cheeks, continued into his beard, so that he gave an impression, to the boy I was then, of some ancient Oriental wizard.[7]

That appearance would have been well-suited to the selling of Tagore in the West as a quintessentially mystical poet, and it could have made it somewhat easier to pigeonhole him. Commenting on Rabindranath's appearance, Frances Cornford told William Rothenstein, "I can now imagine a powerful and gentle Christ, which I never could before." Beatrice Webb, who did not like Tagore and resented what she took to be his "quite obvious dislike of all that the Webbs stand for" (there is, in fact, little evidence that Tagore had given much thought to this subject), said that he was "beautiful to look at" and that "his speech has the perfect intonation and slow chant-like moderation of the dramatic saint."

Ezra Pound and W.B. Yeats, among others, first led the chorus of adoration in the Western appreciation of Tagore, and then soon moved to neglect and even shrill criticism. The contrast between Yeats's praise of his work in 1912 ("These lyrics...display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long," "the work of a supreme culture") and his denunciation in 1935 ("Damn Tagore") arose partly from the inability of Tagore's many-sided writings to fit into the narrow box in which Yeats wanted to place—and keep—him. Certainly, Tagore did write a huge amount, and published ceaselessly, even in English (sometimes in indifferent English translation), but Yeats was also bothered, it is clear, by the difficulty of fitting Tagore's later writings into the image Yeats had presented to the West. Tagore, he had said, was the product of "a whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us," and yet "we have met our own image,...or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature, our voice as in a dream."[8]

Yeats did not totally reject his early admiration (as Ezra Pound and several others did), and he included some of Tagore's early poems in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, which he edited in 1936. Yeats also had some favorable things to say about Tagore's prose writings. His censure of Tagore's later poems was reinforced by his dislike of Tagore's own English translations of his work ("Tagore does not know English, no Indian knows English," Yeats explained), unlike the English version of *Gitanjali* which Yeats had himself helped to prepare. Poetry is, of course, notoriously difficult to translate, and anyone who knows Tagore's poems in their original Bengali cannot feel satisfied with any of the translations (made with or without Yeats's help). Even the translations of his prose works suffer, to some extent, from distortion. E.M. Forster noted, in a review of a translation of one of Tagore's great Bengali novels, *The Home and the World*, in 1919: "The theme is so beautiful," but the charms have "vanished in translation," or perhaps "in an experiment that has not quite come off."[9]

Tagore himself played a somewhat bemused part in the boom and bust of his English reputation. He accepted the extravagant praise with much surprise as well as pleasure, and then received denunciations with even greater surprise, and barely concealed pain. Tagore was sensitive to criticism, and was hurt by even the most far-fetched accusations, such as the charge that he was getting credit for the work of Yeats, who had "rewritten" *Gitanjali*. (This charge was made by a correspondent for *The Times*, Sir Valentine Chirol, whom E.M. Forster once described as "an old Anglo-Indian reactionary hack.") From time to time Tagore also protested the crudity of some of his overexcited advocates. He wrote to C.F. Andrews in 1920: "These people...are like drunkards who are afraid of their lucid intervals."

3.

God and Others

Yeats was not wrong to see a large religious element in Tagore's writings. He certainly had interesting and arresting things to say about life and death. Susan Owen, the mother of Wilfred Owen, wrote to Rabindranath

in 1920, describing her last conversations with her son before he left for the war which would take his life. Wilfred said goodbye with "those wonderful words of yours—beginning at 'When I go from hence, let this be my parting word.'" When Wilfred's pocket notebook was returned to his mother, she found "these words written in his dear writing—with your name beneath."

The idea of a direct, joyful, and totally fearless relationship with God can be found in many of Tagore's religious writings, including the poems of *Gitanjali*. From India's diverse religious traditions he drew many ideas, both from ancient texts and from popular poetry. But "the bright pebbly eyes of the Theosophists" do not stare out of his verses. Despite the archaic language of the original translation of *Gitanjali*, which did not, I believe, help to preserve the simplicity of the original, its elementary humanity comes through more clearly than any complex and intense spirituality:

> *Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut?*
> *Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!*
> *He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones.*
> *He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust.*

An ambiguity about religious experience is central to many of Tagore's devotional poems, and makes them appeal to readers irrespective of their beliefs; but excessively detailed interpretation can ruinously strip away that ambiguity.[10] This applies particularly to his many poems which combine images of human love and those of pious devotion. Tagore writes:

> *I have no sleep to-night. Ever and again I open my door and look out on the darkness, my friend!*
> *I can see nothing before me. I wonder where lies thy path!*
> *By what dim shore of the ink-black river, by what far edge of the frowning forest, through what mazy depth of gloom, art thou threading thy course to come to see me, my friend?*

I suppose it could be helpful to be told, as Yeats hastens to explain, that "the servant or the bride awaiting the master's home-coming in the empty house" is "among the images of the heart turning to God." But in Yeats's considerate attempt to make sure that the reader does not miss the "main point," something of the enigmatic beauty of the Bengali poem is lost—even what had survived the antiquated language of the English translation. Tagore certainly had strongly held religious beliefs (of an unusually nondenominational kind), but he was interested in a great many other things as well and had many different things to say about them.

Some of the ideas he tried to present were directly political, and they figure rather prominently in his letters and lectures. He had practical, plainly expressed views about nationalism, war and peace, cross-cultural education, freedom of the mind, the importance of rational criticism, the need for openness, and so on. His admirers in the West, however, were tuned to the more otherworldly themes which had been emphasized by his first Western patrons. People came to his public lectures in Europe and America, expecting ruminations on grand, transcendental themes; when they heard instead his views on the way public leaders should behave, there was some resentment, particularly (as E. P. Thompson reports) when he delivered political criticism "at $700 a scold."

4.

Reasoning in Freedom

For Tagore it was of the highest importance that people be able to live, and reason, in freedom. His attitudes toward politics and culture, nationalism and internationalism, tradition and modernity, can all be seen in the light of this belief.[11] Nothing, perhaps, expresses his values as clearly as a poem in *Gitanjali*:

> *Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;*
> *Where knowledge is free;*
> *Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls; . . .*
> *Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit; . . .*
> *Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.*

Rabindranath's qualified support for nationalist movements—and his opposition to the unfreedom of alien rule—came from this commitment. So did his reservations about patriotism, which, he argued, can limit both the freedom to engage ideas from outside "narrow domestic walls" and the freedom also to support the causes of people in other countries. Rabindranath's passion for freedom underlies his firm opposition to unreasoned traditionalism, which makes one a prisoner of the past (lost, as he put it, in "the dreary desert sand of dead habit").

Tagore illustrates the tyranny of the past in his amusing yet deeply serious parable "Kartar Bhoot" ("The Ghost of the Leader"). As the respected leader of an imaginary land is about to die, his panic-stricken followers request him to stay on after his death to instruct them on what to do. He consents. But his followers find their lives are full of rituals and constraints on everyday behavior and are not responsive to the world around them. Ultimately, they request the ghost of the leader to relieve them of his domination, when he informs them that he exists only in their minds.

Tagore's deep aversion to any commitment to the past that could not be modified by contemporary reason extended even to the alleged virtue of invariably keeping past promises. On one occasion when Mahatma Gandhi visited Tagore's school at Santiniketan, a young woman got him to sign her autograph book. Gandhi wrote: "Never make a promise in haste. Having once made it fulfill it at the cost of your life." When he saw this entry, Tagore became agitated. He wrote in the same book a short poem in Bengali to the effect that no one can be made "a prisoner forever with a chain of clay." He went on to conclude in English, possibly so that Gandhi could read it too, "Fling away your promise if it is found to be wrong."[12]

Tagore had the greatest admiration for Mahatma Gandhi as a person and as a political leader, but he was also highly skeptical of Gandhiji's form of nationalism and his conservative instincts regarding the country's past traditions. He never criticized Gandhi personally. In the 1938 essay, "Gandhi the Man," he wrote:

> Great as he is as a politician, as an organizer, as a leader of men, as a moral reformer, he is greater than all these as a man, because none of these aspects and activities limits his humanity. They are rather inspired and sustained by it.

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And yet there is a deep division between the two men. Tagore was explicit about his disagreement:

> We who often glorify our tendency to ignore reason, installing in its place blind faith, valuing it as spiritual, are ever paying for its cost with the obscuration of our mind and destiny. I blamed Mahatmaji for exploiting this irrational force of credulity in our people, which might have had a quick result [in creating] a superstructure, while sapping the foundation. Thus began my estimate of Mahatmaji, as the guide of our nation, and it is fortunate for me that it did not end there.

But while it "did not end there," that difference of vision was a powerful divider.

Tagore, for example, remained unconvinced of the merit of Gandhi's forceful advocacy that everyone should spin at home with the "charka," the primitive spinning wheel. For Gandhi this practice was an important part of India's self-realization. "The spinning-wheel gradually became," as his biographer B. R. Nanda writes, "the center of rural uplift in the Gandhian scheme of Indian economics."[13] Tagore found the alleged economic rationale for this scheme quite unrealistic. As Romain Rolland noted, Rabindranath "never tires of criticizing the charka." In this economic judgment, Tagore was probably right. Except for the rather small specialized market for high-quality spun cloth, it is hard to make economic sense of hand-spinning, even with wheels less primitive than Gandhi's charka. Hand-spinning as a widespread activity can survive only with the help of heavy government subsidies.[14]

However, Gandhi's advocacy of the charka was not based only on economics. He wanted everyone to spin for "thirty minutes every day as a sacrifice," seeing this as a way for people who are better off to identify themselves with the less fortunate. He was impatient with Tagore's refusal to grasp this point:

> The poet lives for the morrow, and would have us do likewise.... "Why should I, who have no need to work for food, spin?" may be the question asked. Because I am eating what does not belong to me. I am living on the spoliation of my countrymen. Trace the source of every coin that finds its way into your pocket, and you will realise the truth of what I write. spin like the others. Let him burn his foreign clothes; that is the duty today. God will take care of the morrow.[15]

If Tagore had missed something in Gandhi's argument, so did Gandhi miss the point of Tagore's main criticism. It was not only that the charka made little economic sense, but also, Tagore thought, that it was not the way to make people reflect on anything: "The charka does not require anyone to think; one simply turns the wheel of the antiquated invention endlessly, using the minimum of judgment and stamina."

Albert Einstein and Tagore, in New York, 1930

5.

Celibacy and Personal Life

Tagore and Gandhi's attitudes toward personal life were also quite different. Gandhi was keen on the virtues of celibacy, theorized about it, and, after some years of conjugal life, made a private commitment—publicly announced—to refrain from sleeping with his wife. Rabindranath's own attitude on this subject was very different, but he was gentle about their disagreements:

> [Gandhiji] condemns sexual life as inconsistent with the moral progress of man, and has a horror of sex as great as that of the author of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, but, unlike Tolstoy, he betrays no abhorrence of the sex that tempts his kind. In fact, his tenderness for women is one of the noblest and most consistent traits of his character, and he counts among the women of his country some of his best and truest comrades in the great movement he is leading.

Tagore's personal life was, in many ways, an unhappy one. He married in 1883, lost his wife in 1902, and never remarried. He sought close companionship, which he did not always get (perhaps even during his married life—he wrote to his wife, Mrinalini: "If you and I could be comrades in all our work and in all our thoughts it would be splendid, but we cannot attain all that we desire"). He maintained a warm friendship with, and a strong Platonic attachment to, the literature-loving wife, Kadambari, of his elder brother, Jyotirindranath. He dedicated some poems to her before his marriage, and several books afterward, some after her death (she committed suicide, for reasons that are not fully understood, at the age of twenty-five, four months after Rabindranath's wedding).

Much later in life, during his tour of Argentina in 1924–1925, Rabindranath came to know the talented and beautiful Victoria Ocampo, who later became the publisher of the literary magazine *Sur*. They became close friends, but it appears that Rabindranath deflected the possibility of a passionate relationship into a confined intellectual one.[16] His friend Leonard Elmhirst, who accompanied Rabindranath on his Argentine tour, wrote:

> Besides having a keen intellectual understanding of his books, she was in love with him—but instead of being content to build a friend-

ship on the basis of intellect, she was in a hurry to establish that kind of proprietary right over him which he absolutely would not brook.

Ocampo and Elmhirst, while remaining friendly, were both quite rude in what they wrote about each other. Ocampo's book on Tagore (of which a Bengali translation was made from the Spanish by the distinguished poet and critic Shankha Ghosh) is primarily concerned with Tagore's writings but also discusses the pleasures and difficulties of their relationship, giving quite a different account from Elmhirst's, and never suggesting any sort of proprietary intentions.

Victoria Ocampo, however, makes it clear that she very much wanted to get physically closer to Rabindranath: "Little by little he [Tagore] partially tamed the young animal, by turns wild and docile, who did not sleep, dog-like, on the floor outside his door, simply because it was not done."[17] Rabindranath, too, was clearly very much attracted to her. He called her "Vijaya" (the Sanskrit equivalent of Victoria), dedicated a book of poems to her, *Purabi*—an "evening melody," and expressed great admiration for her mind ("like a star that was distant"). In a letter to her he wrote, as if to explain his own reticence:

> When we were together, we mostly played with words and tried to laugh away our best opportunities to see each other clearly. . . . Whenever there is the least sign of the nest becoming a jealous rival of the sky[,] my mind, like a migrant bird, tries to take . . . flight to a distant shore.

Five years later, during Tagore's European tour in 1930, he sent her a cable: "Will you not come and see me." She did. But their relationship did not seem to go much beyond conversation, and their somewhat ambiguous correspondence continued over the years. Written in 1940, a year before his death at eighty, one of the poems in *Shesh Lekha* ("Last Writings"), seems to be about her: "How I wish I could once again find my way to that foreign land where waits for me the message of love!/. . . Her language I knew not, but what her eyes said will forever remain eloquent in its anguish."[18]

However indecisive, or confused, or awkward Rabindranath may have been, he certainly did not share Mahatma Gandhi's censorious views of sex. In fact, when it came to social policy, he advocated contraception and family planning while Gandhi preferred abstinence.

6.

Science and the People

Gandhi and Tagore severely clashed over their totally different attitudes toward science. In January 1934, Bihar was struck by a devastating earthquake which killed thousands of people. Gandhi, who was then deeply involved in the fight against untouchability (the barbaric system inherited from India's divisive past, in which "lowly people" were kept at a physical distance), extracted a positive lesson from the tragic event. "A man like me," Gandhi argued, "cannot but believe this earthquake is a divine chastisement sent by God for our sins"—in particular the sins of untouchability. "For me there is a vital connection between the Bihar calamity and the untouchability campaign."

Tagore, who equally abhorred untouchability and had joined Gandhi in the movements against it, protested against this interpretation of an event that had caused suffering and death to so many innocent people, including children and babies. He also hated the epistemology implicit in seeing an earthquake as caused by ethical failure. "It is," he wrote, "all the more unfortunate because this kind of unscientific view of [natural] phenomena is too readily accepted by a large section of our countrymen."

The two remained deeply divided over their attitudes toward science. However, while Tagore believed that modern science was essential to understanding physical phenomena, his views on epistemology were interestingly heterodox. He did not take the simple "realist" position often associated with modern science. The report of his conversation with Einstein, published in *The New York Times* in 1930, shows how insistent Tagore was on interpreting truth through observation and reflective concepts. To assert that something is true or untrue in the absence of anyone to observe or perceive its truth, or to form a conception of what it is, appeared to Tagore to be deeply questionable. When Einstein remarked, "If there were no human beings any more, the Apollo Belvedere no longer would be beautiful?" Tagore simply replied, "No." Going further—and into much more interesting territory—Einstein said, "I agree with regard to this conception of beauty, but not with regard to truth." Tagore's response was: "Why not? Truth is realized through men."[19]

Tagore's epistemology, which he never pursued systematically, would seem to be searching for a line of reasoning that would later be elegantly developed by Hilary Putnam, who has argued: "Truth depends on conceptual schemes and it is nonetheless 'real truth.'"[20] Tagore himself said little to explain his convictions, but it is important to take account of his heterodoxy, not only because his speculations were invariably interesting, but also because they illustrate how his support for any position, including his strong interest in science, was accompanied by critical scrutiny.

7.

Nationalism and Colonialism

Tagore was predictably hostile to communal sectarianism (such as a Hindu orthodoxy that was antagonistic to Islamic, Christian, or Sikh perspectives). But even nationalism seemed to him to be suspect. Isaiah Berlin summarizes well Tagore's complex position on Indian nationalism:

> Tagore stood fast on the narrow causeway, and did not betray his vision of the difficult truth. He condemned romantic overattachment to the past, what he called the tying of India to the past "like a sacrificial goat tethered to a post," and he accused men who displayed it—they seemed to him reactionary—of not knowing what true political freedom was, pointing out that it is from English thinkers and English books that the very notion of political liberty was derived. But against cosmopolitanism he maintained that the English stood on their own feet, and so must Indians. In 1917 he once more denounced the danger of "leaving everything to the unalterable will of the Master," be he brahmin or Englishman.[21]

The duality Berlin points to is well reflected also in Tagore's attitude toward cultural diversity. He wanted Indians to learn what is going on elsewhere, how others lived, what they valued, and so on, while remaining interested and involved in their own culture and heritage. Indeed, in his educational writings the need for synthesis is strongly stressed. It can also be found in his advice to Indian students abroad. In 1907 he wrote to his son-in-law Nagendranath Gangulee, who had gone to America to study agriculture:

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To get on familiar terms with the local people is a part of your education. To know only agriculture is not enough; you must know America too. Of course if, in the process of knowing America, one begins to lose one's identity and falls into the trap of becoming an Americanised person contemptuous of everything Indian, it is preferable to stay in a locked room.

Tagore was strongly involved in protest against the Raj on a number of occasions, most notably in the movement to resist the 1905 British proposal to split in two the province of Bengal, a plan that was eventually withdrawn following popular resistance. He was forthright in denouncing the brutality of British rule in India, never more so than after the Amritsar massacre of April 13, 1919, when 379 unarmed people at a peaceful meeting were gunned down by the army, and two thousand more were wounded. Between April 23 and 26, Rabindranath wrote five agitated letters to C. F. Andrews, who himself was extremely disturbed, especially after he was told by a British civil servant in India that thanks to this show of strength, the "moral prestige" of the Raj had "never been higher."

A month after the massacre, Tagore wrote to the Viceroy of India, asking to be relieved of the knighthood he had accepted four years earlier:

> **The disproportionate severity of the punishments inflicted upon the unfortunate people and the methods of carrying them out, we are convinced, are without parallel in the history of civilized governments, barring some conspicuous exceptions, recent and remote. Considering that such treatment has been meted out to a population, disarmed and resourceless, by a power which has the most terribly efficient organisation for destruction of human lives, we must strongly assert that it can claim no political expediency, far less moral justification.... The universal agony of indignation roused in the hearts of our people has been ignored by our rulers—possibly congratulating themselves for imparting what they imagine as salutary lessons.... I for my part want to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen who for their so-called insignificance are liable to suffer a degradation not fit for human beings.**

Both Gandhi and Nehru expressed their appreciation of the important part Tagore took in the national struggle. It is fitting that after independence, India chose a song of Tagore ("Jana Gana Mana Adhinayaka," which can be roughly translated as "the leader of people's minds") as its national anthem. Since Bangladesh would later choose another song of Tagore ("Amar Sonar Bangla") as its national anthem, he may be the only one ever to have authored the national anthems of two different countries.

Tagore's criticism of the British administration of India was consistently strong and grew more intense over the years. This point is often missed, since he made a special effort to dissociate his criticism of the Raj from any denigration of British—or Western—people and culture. Mahatma Gandhi's well-known quip in reply to a question, asked in England, on what he thought of Western civilization ("It would be a good idea") could not have come from Tagore's lips. He would understand the provocations to which Gandhi was responding—involving cultural conceit as well as imperial tyranny. D. H. Lawrence supplied a fine example of the former: "I become more and more surprised to see how far higher, in reality, our European civilization stands than the East, Indian and Persian, ever dreamed of.... This fraud of looking up to them—this wretched worship-of-Tagore attitude—is disgusting." But, unlike Gandhi, Tagore could not, even in jest, be dismissive of Western civilization.

Even in his powerful indictment of British rule in India in 1941, in a lecture which he gave on his last birthday, and which was later published as a pamphlet under the title *Crisis in Civilization*, he strains hard to maintain the distinction between opposing Western imperialism and rejecting Western civilization. While he saw India as having been "smothered under the dead weight of British administration" (adding "another great and ancient civilization for whose recent tragic history the British cannot disclaim responsibility is China"), Tagore recalls what India has gained from "discussions centred upon Shakespeare's drama and Byron's poetry and above all... the large-hearted liberalism of nineteenth-century English politics." The tragedy, as Tagore saw it, came from the fact that what "was truly best in their own civilization, the upholding of dignity of human relationships, has no place in the British administration of this country." "If in its place they have established, **baton in hand, a reign of 'law and order,' or in other words a policeman's rule, such a mockery of civilization can claim no respect from us."**

8.

Critique of Patriotism

Rabindranath rebelled against the strongly nationalist form that the independence movement often took, and this made him refrain from taking a particularly active part in contemporary politics. He wanted to assert India's right to be independent without denying the importance of what India could learn—freely and profitably—from abroad. He was afraid that a rejection of the West in favor of an indigenous Indian tradition was not only limiting in itself; it could easily turn into hostility to other influences from abroad, including Christianity, which came to parts of India by the fourth century, Judaism, which came through Jewish immigration shortly after the fall of Jerusalem, as did Zoroastrianism through Parsi immigration later on (mainly in the eighth century), and, of course—and most importantly—Islam, which has had a very strong presence in India since the tenth century.

Rabindranath in later life, drawing by Satyajit Ray

Tagore's criticism of patriotism is a persistent theme in his writings. As early as 1908, he put his position succinctly in a letter replying to the criticism of Abala Bose, the wife of a great Indian scientist, Jagadish Chandra Bose: "Patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter; my refuge is humanity. I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds, and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as

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long as I live." His novel *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*) has much to say about this theme. In the novel, Nikhil, who is keen on social reform, including women's liberation, but cool toward nationalism, gradually loses the esteem of his spirited wife, Bimala, because of his failure to be enthusiastic about anti-British agitations, which she sees as a lack of patriotic commitment. Bimala becomes fascinated with Nikhil's nationalist friend Sandip, who speaks brilliantly and acts with patriotic militancy, and she falls in love with him. Nikhil refuses to change his views: "I am willing to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it."[22]

As the story unfolds, Sandip becomes angry with some of his countrymen for their failure to join the struggle as readily as he thinks they should ("Some Mohamedan traders are still obdurate"). He arranges to deal with the recalcitrants by burning their meager trading stocks and physically attacking them. Bimala has to acknowledge the connection between Sandip's rousing nationalistic sentiments and his sectarian—and ultimately violent—actions. The dramatic events that follow (Nikhil attempts to help the victims, risking his life) include the end of Bimala's political romance.

This is a difficult subject, and Satyajit Ray's beautiful film of *The Home and the World* brilliantly brings out the novel's tensions, along with the human affections and disaffections of the story. Not surprisingly, the story has had many detractors, not just among dedicated nationalists in India. Georg Lukács found Tagore's novel to be "a petit bourgeois yarn of the shoddiest kind," "at the intellectual service of the British police," and "a contemptible caricature of Gandhi." It would, of course, be absurd to think of Sandip as Gandhi, but the novel gives a "strong and gentle" warning, as Bertolt Brecht noted in his diary, of the corruptibility of nationalism, since it is not ever even handed. Hatred of one group can lead to hatred of others, no matter how far such feeling may be from the minds of large-hearted nationalist leaders like Mahatma Gandhi.

9.

Admiration and Criticism of Japan

Tagore's reaction to nationalism in Japan is particularly telling. As in the case of India, he saw the need to build the self-confidence of a defeated and humiliated people, of people left behind by developments elsewhere, as was the case in Japan before its emergence during the nineteenth century. At the beginning of one of his lectures in Japan in 1916 ("Nationalism in Japan"), he observed that "the worst form of bondage is the bondage of dejection, which keeps men hopelessly chained in loss of faith in themselves." Tagore shared the admiration for Japan widespread in Asia for demonstrating the ability of an Asian nation to rival the West in industrial development and economic progress. He noted with great satisfaction that Japan had "in giant strides left centuries of inaction behind, overtaking the present time in its foremost achievement." For other nations outside the West, he said, Japan "has broken the spell under which we lay in torpor for ages, taking it to be the normal condition of certain races living in certain geographical limits."

But then Tagore went on to criticize the rise of a strong nationalism in Japan, and its emergence as an imperialist nation. Tagore's outspoken criticisms did not please Japanese audiences and, as E. P. Thompson wrote, "the welcome given to him on his first arrival soon cooled."[23] Twenty-two years later, in 1937, during the Japanese war on China, Tagore received a letter from Rash Behari Bose, an anti-British Indian revolutionary then living in Japan, who sought Tagore's approval for his efforts there on behalf of Indian independence, in which he had the support of the Japanese government. Tagore replied:

> Your cable has caused me many restless hours, for it hurts me very much to have to ignore your appeal. I wish you had asked for my cooperation in a cause against which my spirit did not protest. I know, in making this appeal, you counted on my great regard for the Japanese for I, along with the rest of Asia, did once admire and look up to Japan and did once fondly hope that in Japan Asia had at last discovered its challenge to the West, that Japan's new strength would be consecrated in safeguarding the culture of the East against alien interests. But Japan has not taken long to betray that rising hope and repudiate all that seemed significant in her wonderful, and, to us symbolic, awakening, and has now become itself a worse menace to the defenceless peoples of the East.

How to view Japan's position in the Second World War was a divisive issue in India. After the war, when Japanese political leaders were tried for war crimes, the sole dissenting voice among the judges came from the Indian judge, Radhabinod Pal, a distinguished jurist. Pal dissented on various grounds, among them that no fair trial was possible in view of the asymmetry of power between the victor and the defeated. Ambivalent feelings in India toward the Japanese military aggression, given the unacceptable nature of British imperialism, possibly had a part in predisposing Pal to consider a perspective different from that of the other judges.

More tellingly, Subhas Chandra Bose (no relation of Rash Behari Bose), a leading nationalist, made his way to Japan during the war via Italy and Germany after escaping from a British prison; he helped the Japanese to form units of Indian soldiers, who had earlier surrendered to the advancing Japanese army, to fight on the Japanese side as the "Indian National Army." Rabindranath had formerly entertained great admiration for Subhas Bose as a dedicated nonsectarian fighter for Indian independence.[24] But their ways would have parted when Bose's political activities took this turn, although Tagore was dead by the time Bose reached Japan.

Tagore saw Japanese militarism as illustrating the way nationalism can mislead even a nation of great achievement and promise. In 1938 Yone Noguchi, the distinguished poet and friend of Tagore (as well as of Yeats and Pound), wrote to Tagore, pleading with him to change his mind about Japan. Rabindranath's reply, written on September 12, 1938, was altogether uncompromising:

> It seems to me that it is futile for either of us to try to convince the other, since your faith in the infallible right of Japan to bully other Asiatic nations into line with your Government's policy is not shared by me.... Believe me, it is sorrow and shame, not anger, that prompt me to write to you. I suffer intensely not only because the reports of Chinese suffering batter against my heart, but because I can no longer point out with pride the example of a great Japan.

He would have been much happier with the postwar emergence of Japan as a peaceful power. Then, too, since he was not free of egotism, he would also have been pleased by the attention paid to his ideas by the novelist Yasunari Kawabata and others.[25]

10.

International Concerns

Tagore was not invariably well-informed about international politics. He allowed himself to be entertained by Mussolini in a short visit to Italy in May–June 1926, a visit arranged by Carlo Formichi, professor of Sanskrit at the University of Rome. When he asked to meet Benedetto Croce, Formichi said, "Impossible! Impossible!" Mussolini told him that Croce was "not in Rome." When Tagore said he would go "wherever he is," Mussolini assured him that Croce's whereabouts were unknown.

Such incidents, as well as warnings from Romain Rolland and other friends, should have ended Tagore's flirtation with Mussolini more quickly than it did. But only after he received graphic accounts of the brutality of Italian fascism from two exiles, Gaetano Salvemini and Gaetano Salvadori, and learned more of what was happening in Italy, did he publicly denounce the regime, publishing a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* in August. The next month, *Popolo d'Italia*, the magazine edited by Benito Mussolini's brother, replied: "Who cares? Italy laughs at Tagore and those who brought this unctuous and insupportable fellow in our midst."

With his high expectations of Britain, Tagore continued to be surprised by what he took to be a lack of official sympathy for international victims of aggression. He returned to this theme in the lecture he gave on his last birthday, in 1941:

> While Japan was quietly devouring North China, her act of wanton aggression was ignored as a minor incident by the veterans of British diplomacy. We have also witnessed from this distance how actively the British statesmen acquiesced in the destruction of the Spanish Republic.

But distinguishing between the British government and the British people, Rabindranath went on to note "with admiration how a band of valiant Englishmen laid down their lives for Spain."

Tagore's view of the Soviet Union has been a subject of much discussion. He was widely read in Russia. In 1917 several Russian translations of *Gitanjali* (one edited by Ivan Bunin, later the first Russian Nobel laureate in literature) were available, and by the late 1920s many of the English versions of his work had been rendered into Russian by several distinguished translators. Russian versions of his work continued to appear: Boris Pasternak translated him in the 1950s and 1960s.

When Tagore visited Russia in 1930, he was much impressed by its development efforts and by what he saw as a real commitment to eliminate poverty and economic inequality. But what impressed him most was the expansion of basic education across the old Russian empire. In *Letters from Russia*, written in Bengali and published in 1931, he unfavorably compares the acceptance of widespread illiteracy in India by the British administration with Russian efforts to expand education:

> In stepping on the soil of Russia, the first thing that caught my eye was that in education, at any rate, the peasant and the working classes have made such enormous progress in these few years that nothing comparable has happened even to our highest classes in the course of the last hundred and fifty years.... The people here are not at all afraid of giving complete education even to Turcomans of distant Asia; on the contrary, they are utterly in earnest about it.[26]

When parts of the book were translated into English in 1934, the undersecretary for India stated in Parliament that it was "calculated by distortion of the facts to bring the British Administration in India into contempt and disrepute," and the book was then promptly banned. The English version would not be published until after independence.

11.

Education and Freedom

The British Indian administrators were not, however, alone in trying to suppress Tagore's reflections on Russia. They were joined by Soviet officials. In an interview with *Izvestia* in 1930, Tagore sharply criticized the lack of freedom that he observed in Russia:

> I must ask you: Are you doing your ideal a service by arousing in the minds of those under your training anger, class-hatred, and revengefulness against those whom you consider to be your enemies?... Freedom of mind is needed for the reception of truth; terror hopelessly kills it.... For the sake of humanity I hope you may never create a vicious force of violence, which will go on weaving an interminable chain of violence and cruelty.... You have tried to destroy many of the other evils of [the czarist] period. Why not try to destroy this one also?

The interview was not published in *Izvestia* until 1988—nearly sixty years later.[27]

Tagore's reaction to the Russia of 1930 arose from two of his strongest commitments: his uncompromising belief in the importance of "freedom of mind" (the source of his criticism of the Soviet Union), and his conviction that the expansion of basic education is central to social progress (the source of his praise, particularly in contrast to British-run India). He identified the lack of basic education as the fundamental cause of many of India's social and economic afflictions:

> In my view the imposing tower of misery which today rests on the heart of India has its sole foundation in the absence of education. Caste divisions, religious conflicts, aversion to work, precarious economic conditions—all centre on this single factor.

Tagore was concerned not only that there be wider opportunities for education across the country (especially in rural areas where schools were few), but also that the schools themselves be more lively and enjoyable. He himself had dropped out of school early, largely out of boredom, and had never bothered to earn a diploma. He wrote extensively on how schools should be made more attractive to boys and girls and thus more productive. His own coeducational school at Santiniketan had many progressive features. The emphasis here was on self-motivation rather than on discipline, and on fostering intellectual curiosity rather than competitive excellence.

Much of Rabindranath's life was spent in developing the school at Santiniketan. The school never had much money, since the fees were very low. His lecture honoraria, "$700 a scold."

went to support it, as well as most of his Nobel Prize money. The school received no support from the government, but did get help from private citizens—even Mahatma Gandhi raised money for it.

The dispute with Mahatma Gandhi on the Bihar earthquake touched on a subject that was very important to Tagore: the need for education in science as well as in literature and the humanities. At Santiniketan, there were strong "local" elements in its emphasis on Indian traditions, including the classics, and in the use of Bengali rather than English as the language of instruction. At the same time there were courses on a great variety of cultures, and study programs devoted to China, Japan, and the Middle East. Many foreigners came to Santiniketan to study or teach, and the fusion of studies seemed to work.

I am partial to seeing Tagore as an educator, having myself been educated at Santiniketan. The school was unusual in many different ways, such as the oddity that classes, excepting those requiring a laboratory, were held outdoors (whenever the weather permitted). No matter what we thought of Rabindranath's belief that one gains from being in a natural setting while learning (some of us argued about this theory), we typically found the experience of outdoor schooling extremely attractive and pleasant. Academically, our school was not particularly exacting (often we did not have any examinations at all), and it could not, by the usual academic standards, compete with some of the better schools in Calcutta. But there was something remarkable about the ease with which class discussions could move from Indian traditional literature to contemporary as well as classical Western thought, and then to the culture of China or Japan or elsewhere. The school's celebration of variety was also in sharp contrast with the cultural conservatism and separatism that has tended to grip India from time to time.

The cultural give and take of Tagore's vision of the contemporary world has close parallels with the vision of Satyajit Ray, also an alumnus of Santiniketan who made several films based on Tagore's stories.[28] Ray's words about Santiniketan in 1991 would have greatly pleased Rabindranath:

> I consider the three years I spent in Santiniketan as the most fruitful of my life.... Santiniketan opened my eyes for the first time to the splendours of Indian and Far Eastern art. Until then I was completely under the sway of Western art, music and literature. Santiniketan made me the combined product of East and West that I am.[29]

12.

Fifty Years after Independence

As the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence approaches, the reckoning of what India has or has not achieved in this half century is becoming a subject of considerable interest: "What has been the story of those first fifty years?" (as Shashi Tharoor asks in his balanced, informative, and highly readable account of *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*).[30] If Tagore were to see the India of today, half a century after independence, nothing perhaps would shock him so much as the continued illiteracy of the masses. He would see this as a total betrayal of what the nationalist leaders had promised during the struggle for independence—a promise that had figured even in Nehru's rousing speech on the eve of independence in August 1947 (on India's "tryst with destiny").

In view of his interest in childhood education, Tagore would not be consoled by the extraordinary expansion of university education, in which India sends to its universities six times as many people per unit of population as does China. Rather, he would be stunned that, in contrast to East and Southeast Asia, including China, half the adult population and two thirds of Indian women remain unable to read or write. Statistically reliable surveys indicate that even in the late 1980s, nearly half of the rural girls between the ages of twelve and fourteen did not attend any school for a single day of their lives.[31]

This state of affairs is the result of the continuation of British imperial neglect of mass education, which has been reinforced by India's traditional elitism, as well as upper-class–dominated contemporary politics (except in parts of India such as Kerala, where anti-upper-caste movements have tended to concentrate on education as a great leveller). Tagore would see illiteracy and the neglect of education not only as the main source of India's continued social backwardness, but also as a great constraint that restricts the possibility and reach of economic development in India (as his writings on rural development forcefully make clear). Tagore would also have strongly felt the need for a greater commitment—and a greater sense of urgency—in removing endemic poverty.

At the same time, Tagore would undoubtedly find some satisfaction in the survival of democracy in India, in its relatively free press, and in general from the "freedom of mind" that post-independence Indian politics has, on the whole, managed to maintain. He would also be pleased by the fact noted by the historian E. P. Thompson (whose father Edward Thompson had written one of the first major biographies of Tagore[32]):

> All the convergent influences of the world run through this society: Hindu, Moslem, Christian, secular; Stalinist, liberal, Maoist, democratic socialist, Gandhian. There is not a thought that is being thought in the West or East that is not active in some Indian mind.[33]

Tagore would have been happy also to see that the one governmental attempt to dispense generally with basic liberties and political and civil rights in India, in the 1970s, when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (ironically, herself a former student at Santiniketan) declared an "emergency," was overwhelmingly rejected by the Indian voters, leading to the precipitate fall of her government.

Rabindranath would also see that the changes in policy that have eliminated famine since independence had much to do with the freedom to be heard in a democratic India. In Tagore's play *Raja O Rani* ("The King and the Queen"), the sympathetic Queen eventually rebels against the callousness of state policy toward the hungry. She begins by inquiring about the ugly sounds outside the palace, only to be told that the noise is coming from "the coarse, clamorous crowd who howl unashamedly

to food and disturb the sweet peace of the palace." The Viceregal office in India could have taken a similarly callous view of Indian famines, right up to the easily preventable Bengal famine of 1943, just before independence, which killed between two and three million people. But a government in a multi-party democracy, with elections and free newspapers, cannot any longer dismiss the noise from "the coarse, clamorous crowd."

Unlike Gandhiji, Rabindranath would not resent the development of modern industries in India, or the acceleration of technical progress, since he did not want India to be shackled to the turning of "the wheel of an antiquated invention." Tagore was concerned that people not be dominated by machines, but he was not opposed to making good use of modern technology. "The mastery over the machine," he wrote in *Crisis in Civilization*, "by which the British have consolidated their sovereignty over their vast empire, has been kept a sealed book, to which due access has been denied to this helpless country." Rabindranath had a deep interest in the environment—he was particularly concerned about deforestation and initiated a "festival of tree-planting" (*vriksha-ropana*) as early as 1928. He would want increased private and government commitments to environmentalism, but he would not derive from this position a general case against modern industry and technology.

13.

On Cultural Separatism

Rabindranath would be shocked by the growth of cultural separatism in India, as elsewhere. The "openness" that he valued so much is certainly under great strain right now—in many countries. Religious fundamentalism still has a relatively small following in India; but various factions seem to be doing their best to increase their numbers. Certainly religious sectarianism has had much success in some parts of India (particularly in the west and the north). Tagore would see the expansion of religious sectarianism as being closely associated with an artificially separatist view of culture.

He would have strongly resisted defining India in specifically Hindu terms, rather than as a "confluence" of many cultures. Even after the partition of 1947, India is still the third-largest Muslim country in the world, with more Muslims than in Bangladesh, and nearly as many as in Pakistan. Only Indonesia has substantially more followers of Islam. Indeed, by pointing to the immense heterogeneousness of India's cultural background and its richly diverse history, Tagore had argued that the "idea of India" itself militated against a culturally separatist view—"against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others."

Tagore would also oppose the cultural nationalism that has recently been gaining some ground in India, along with an exaggerated fear of the influence of the West. He was uncompromising in his belief that human beings could absorb quite different cultures in constructive ways:

> Whatever we understand and enjoy in human products instantly becomes ours, wherever they might have their origin. I am proud of my humanity when I can acknowledge the poets and artists of other countries as my own. Let me feel with unalloyed gladness that all the great glories of man are mine. Therefore it hurts me deeply when the cry of rejection rings loud against the West in my country with the clamour that Western education can only injure us.

In this context, it is important to emphasize that Rabindranath was not short of pride in India's own heritage, and often spoke about it. He lectured at Oxford, with evident satisfaction, on the importance of India's religious ideas—quoting both from ancient texts and from popular poetry (such as the verses of the sixteenth-century Muslim poet Kabir). In 1940, when he was given an honorary doctorate by Oxford University in a ceremony arranged at his own educational establishment in Santiniketan ("In Gangem Defluit Isis," Oxford helpfully explained), to the predictable "volley of Latin" Tagore responded "by a volley of Sanskrit," as Marjorie Sykes, a Quaker friend of Rabindranath, reports. Her cheerful summary of the match, "India held its own," was not out of line with Tagore's pride in Indian culture. His welcoming attitude to Western civilization was reinforced by this confidence: he did not see India's culture as fragile and in need of "protection" from Western influence.

In India, he wrote, "circumstances almost compel us to learn English, and this lucky accident has given us the opportunity of access into the richest of all poetical literatures of the world." There seems to me much force in Rabindranath's argument for clearly distinguishing between the injustice of a serious asymmetry of power (colonialism being a prime example of this) and the importance nevertheless of appraising Western culture in an open-minded way, in colonial and postcolonial territories, in order to see what uses could be made of it.

Rabindranath insisted on open debate on every issue, and distrusted conclusions based on a mechanical formula, no matter how attractive that formula might seem in isolation (such as "This was forced on us by our colonial masters—we must reject it," "This is our tradition—we must follow it," "We have promised to do this—we must fulfill that promise," and so on). The question he persistently asks is whether we have reason enough to want what is being proposed, taking everything into account. Important as history is, reasoning has to go beyond the past. It is in the sovereignty of reasoning—fearless reasoning in freedom—that we can find Rabindranath Tagore's lasting voice.

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India's 5 Decades of Progress and Pain

By JOHN F. BURNS

KAITHWARI, India — With monsoon rains sheeting down outside, Dawa Chand has passed many days recently in his tiny, darkened tent-maker's shop in this north Indian village, stitching bunting to flutter over village rooftops on the 50th anniversary of India's independence at midnight on Aug. 14, 1947.

As he has pedaled his treadle sewing machine, Mr. Chand, 31, has considered what India's half century as a free country has meant to people like himself, villagers who account for nearly three-quarters of the country's 970 million people. The question goes to the heart of India's nationhood, since it was in the country's 650,000 villages that Mohandas K. Gandhi, who led the independence struggle, found what he considered to be India's soul.

Mr. Chand strikes a note of optimism, crediting free India with achieving more for people like himself, an untouchable at the lowest rung of India's social hierarchy, than has been acknowledged by many of the country's critics. "We are still backward, of course, but we are moving forward, and we owe this to the Mahatma," he said, referring to Gandhi, a champion of the untouchables. "Because of him, people like myself are making progress our fathers and grandfathers never imagined."

In the myriad voices that have been raised in India in its 50th year, there have been many like Mr. Chand's, full of satisfaction for what the decades of independence have brought. Many others have been filled with doubt and recrimination. But perhaps the largest number of Indians have reacted with ambivalence, unsure of how to take the measure of a country

50 YEARS PAST MIDNIGHT

First of two articles.

so vast, so populous and so diverse that is has always defied attempts to define it.

Should Indians celebrate that their country, a grand tapestry of castes, languages, regions and faiths, has survived despite forecasts that it would splinter once Britain's controlling hand was removed? Or do they despair because inherent strains have spawned secessionist movements and other forms of violence that have made India one of the most lethal places on earth?

Should Indians take pride in their parliamentary democracy, vigorously upheld in a world where countries with far fewer problems have remained stifled by autocracy? Or should they lament the failures in their system, the demagogues who have risen to power on the votes of illiterate masses only to betray them, the politicians at every level who have built lives of sybaritic comfort for themselves while 350 million Indians remain mired in poverty?

In recent years, there has been another conundrum, the huge gap that has emerged between the new India of high technology, and the old India of the bullock cart. In Bombay, New Delhi, Calcutta, Madras and scores of other cities, an economy is emerging based on computers, rapid jet travel, air-conditioned hotels and mobile telephones.

This economy's new middle class numbers in the

Continued on Page A10

tens of millions, yet it exists in an uneasy symbiosis with an India where tens of millions of others cannot afford medicine when they are sick and send their tiny children into the street to bang on car windows for coins.

In weighing these contrasts, Indians are asking what matters more, that a country once racked by famines is now feeding itself and even exporting grain, or the crushing levels of illiteracy, disease and poverty that remain India's scourge?

As Indians search for answers, many cannot even agree on what standard they should use. Should they compare India now to the India of 50 years ago or to the accomplishments of a dozen more prosperous Asian nations, most of which India dwarfs in complexity and size?

These contradictions, apparent everywhere in India, were plainly evident in the differing attitudes towards the independence anniversary in Kaithwari. The village's 5,000 residents include a dominant minority of landowners, upper-caste families who still rule the roost, but it also has low-caste families who have found a small measure of prosperity that their families never previously knew. There is also a large block of families, at least a third of the village, who are still desperately poor.

Mr. Chand, the tent-maker, is an obvious case of success. The son of an illiterate cattle-trader, he won a lower-caste scholarship from the government to attend college in Meerut, an old British garrison city close to this village in western Uttar Pradesh state, then returned home after graduation to set up his business. His income from the shop and running a village post office is $130 a month, a fortune to the village's poor.

But among Mr. Chand's neighbors, there are some who have never traveled outside the village, never used a telephone and never had anybody in their family who stayed in school long enough to learn to read or write. In one muddy courtyard, a group of 25 Muslims, in rural India often poorer even than the poorest Hindus, said that the four generations of their family were living off a combined income of $50 a month, and that none of them had owned even a bicycle, a sewing machine or a radio, the first luxuries for India's poor.

For these villagers, the India of 1997 seems much too much like the India of half a century ago, a place where Gandhi's name is ritually invoked by politicians on great public occasions but where his memory is mocked by some of the realities of a country he did not live to see. Although Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu nationalist on Jan. 30, 1948, five months after independence, Indians everywhere still like to muse over what he would make of India if he were to return today.

Among the poorest in Kaithwari, there is a ready answer. "'What is the Mahatma to us today?," said Mohammed Yunus, 48, who works in the fields for the upper-caste Hindus who own 90 percent of Kaithwari's land. Rolling a home-made cigarette of crushed leaves, Mr. Yunus said modern India was little different than the India of his forefathers.

"The Mahatma brought us freedom, but after that, what?" he said.

The Optimists

Stable Democracy Inspires Pride

For many Indians, the answer to that question lies in accomplishments they say have been overlooked in the breast-beating the anniversary has provoked. They hail three achievements in particular: the resilience of democracy despite a two-year lapse when Indira Gandhi assumed dictatorial powers in 1975; the country's success in feeding a population nearly three times larger than in 1947, and India's survival as a nation despite protracted insurgencies in the Punjab, Kashmir and the remote border states of the southeast.

"India can only be compared with India," argues Yogendra Singh, a sociology professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, a sentiment shared by many of India's optimists. By that measure, there is much to celebrate today.

"Poverty now is not at all what it was in 1947," said Mr. Singh, who grew up poor and low-caste in a village in Uttar Pradesh. "Then, 80 to 90 percent of the people had no proper clothing; now, almost everybody is properly dressed. Then, many people were emaciated; now, just about everybody gets two meals a day. Then, life expectancy was about 30, and it's more than 60 now. These are tremendous changes, so I don't think we have any reason to hang our heads."

Many Indians are particularly proud of the persistence of their democracy, and contrast their country with Pakistan, the nation carved out of British India when Muslim leaders demanded a separate state. Although Pakistan has been ruled by elected governments for the last nine years, it has been under military dictatorship for nearly half its half-century as a nation.

On the one occasion that Indian democracy was imperiled, Mrs. Gandhi's declaration of emergency and suspension of civil rights in 1975, voters outraged by the imprisonment of thousands of leading politicians and intellectuals turned on her in the 1977 general election and ousted the Congress Party from power for the first time since it led the independence struggle.

In recent years, a wave of corruption and criminality in Indian politics has caused some Indian commentators to say that democracy is facing a new and more insidious peril. In the assemblies of many of the 25 Indian states, and even in the Parliament in New Delhi, the independence generation has been replaced by a breed of ambitious and acquisitive politicians, some little more than gangsters.

For years, hardly a day has passed without a front-page scandal involving a a politician accused of selling favors. More than a dozen Cabinet ministers who served in the Congress Party are under investigation for corruption, including former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. In Bihar state, India's poorest, the low-caste politician who headed the state's Government until he was arrested last month, Laloo Prasad Yadav, has been jailed on charges of scamming $280 million from the state's animal husbandry funds.

While each scandal swallows money that might have gone to developing the country, some have had a direct impact on everyday life. Millions of Indians are paying the price for a decision in the early 1990's to rebuild the country's telephone system. The telecommunications minister, Sukh Ram, who was a former postal clerk who rose through Congress Party ranks, awarded contracts for a $40 billion scheme that was to have brought the country 10 million new phones, more than double the number then installed, by the end of the decade.

But according to investigations that began after the Narasimha Rao government's defeat in a general election last year, Mr. Ram rigged the bidding process and took large sums in payoffs. In the wake of the scandal, the project to modernize the country's antiquated telephone system has effectively stalled, with not a single new handset anywhere to show for the plans announced by Mr. Ram.

Even shadows like these have not persuaded most Indians that democracy itself is at fault, only that abuses are inevitable with an electorate of nearly 600 million people, half of them illiterate. Some say that political trends that have ended the Congress Party's role as India's natural ruling elite have produced new political forces, and that some of these, including low-caste parties like Mr. Laloo's in Bihar, have been under pressure to generate slush funds that can be used to bind the parties together and give their leaders a lifestyle their followers can admire.

Others say that India's greatest triumph is simply that it still exists. In British times, half of the country consisted of nearly 600 princely states, mostly ruled by maharajahs under British control. While most of these states were successfully integrated soon after independence, strong separatist tendencies have pulled at the country's seams, setting off a series of ethnic, religious and linguistic insurgencies. So far, none has succeeded, and few Indians expect that any will.

"You must remember that people were writing books in the 1950's and 1960's asking whether India could survive," said M.J. Akbar, a biographer of Nehru who is the founding editor of The Asian Age, a new newspaper that has quickly become one of India's most influential. "In 1947, it was very difficult to see how a seething mass of hungry and mostly illiterate people could keep this nation together. But now, the country's survival is taken for granted. You hardly hear anybody questioning it anymore."

The Skeptics

What Would Gandhi Think Today?

While views like these are widely held, the official mood at the anniversary has been heavily influenced by the skeptics. The Gujral Government has deferred the placement of a Gandhi statue on Rajpath, the ceremonial avenue at the heart of New Delhi, expressing reluctance to have Gandhi, the apostle of nonviolence, installed where he would stare down an avenue used every January for a military parade. But many say that erecting a statue would be hypocrisy anyway, since the country, in their view, has betrayed Gandhian ideals.

Among these is Khushwant Singh, 82, an author and columnist who covered the independence struggle and wrote "Train to Pakistan," a novel that gave a searing account of the 1947 partition.

Resisted by Gandhi to the last, the division resulted in the migration of at least 10 million Hindus and Muslims across the new frontier, and as many as 500,000 of them, according to Khushwant Singh's estimate, being killed in the bloodletting that ensued.

Those passions have not abated; Mr. Singh spoke from the apartment where he has lived under armed guard since the 1980's, when he angered Sikh militants with articles condemning a separatist insurgency in his native Punjab.

"Gandhi gave the world an illusion that all Indians were like him, inspired by a missionary concern for nonviolence and the plight of the poor," he said, "but I'm sad to say that it has turned out that hardly any of us are."

Government surveys offer plentiful ammunition for such dismal views: the 350 million Indians who live below the official poverty line; the 48 percent of the population who are illiterate; the 100 million city-dwellers living in vast, dismal slums known as jhuggis, where homes are mostly structures of metal and timber scrap; the 70 percent of Indians with no access to toilets; the 30 percent with no supply of safe water, and the millions who fall victim every year to rates of infant mortality, diarrhea, tuberculosis, malaria and AIDS that are among the highest in the world.

Conditions like these contribute heavily to a culture of violence that some Indians say is the country's worst failure. Outside India, the best-known example has been the cycle of riots between Hindus and Muslims, about 8,000 of which have been recorded since 1947. But far more Indians have died from other causes.

In big cities like Bombay, thousands of murders go unsolved, and for the most part barely investigated, every year. In the villages, the situation is much the same. According to Indian human rights groups, 5,000 women are killed every year in disputes over dowries, mostly by men, but only a handful of cases ever result in convictions.

Alongside these deprivations, many privileged Indians enjoy lives of opulence that mirror the inequalities of earlier times.

Independent India, Then And Now

India, with diversity rivaling America's melting pot, has the second largest population on earth. At its current growth pace, it will surpass China on this count around 2020. Indians speak 17 languages and 22,000 distinct dialects. They practice six major religions. More than half of the population can read, but fewer than half the children under five have enough to eat. What may most confirm, if not define, India as a nation, are the mountains capping the north and oceans cradling the rest.

India along with Pakistan, China and Indonesia emerged from similar economic circumstance at similar times in history. Here is how they compare today.

		Population In millions; 1997	Infant mortality Per 1,000 live births	Births Per 1,000 people	Life expectancy At birth	G.N.P. per capita In dollars; 1995 and 1953	Armed forces Total troop strength, in thousands	Foreign direct investment Billions of dollars	Telephone lines Per 1,000 people	Illiteracy rate Percent of people older than 15	Engineers, scientists, technicians Percent of labor force; 1990
INDIA 1,222,000 square miles	'50-'51	350	146	40	32.1	$60	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	81.7%	N.A.
	'95	973	68	26	62.3	340	1,145	$1.3	12.9	48.0	0.96%
PAKISTAN 307,000	'95	130	90	38	59.9	460	587	0.4	16.4	62.2	1.48
CHINA 3,695,000	'95	1,200	34	17	69.4	620	2,930	35.8	33.9	18.5	1.48
INDONESIA 575,000	'95	193	51	23	63.8	980	275	4.3	16.9	16.2	3.30

buckle down, and see what we can accomplish in the next 50 years."

At first glance, visitors to Kaithwari could think that little in the village has changed. Buffalos wander down cobbled pathways. In the sunlight after the rains, old men draw quietly on hookahs, the brass water pipes that are traditional in rural India. At street-corner pumps, young girls giggle as they wash shoulder-length hair. Barefoot children scamper, chasing goats, while Muslim women move silently along lanes gathering buffalo dung for fuel.

But villagers are eager to list the things that have improved. For some, it is the paving of once-muddy roads leading to Meerut, 15 miles away; for others, the villages' three schools, with enrollments accounting for 90 percent of all village children; for others still, electricity that flows three or four hours on most days, long enough to power pumps that irrigate fields, raise water from wells, and power television sets that many better-off villagers now own.

These improvements seem to have emboldened many villagers, leading them to question old social roles and even to demand more from their government. Naresh Kumar, a 35-year-old man from an untouchable background, held his tongue when Brahma Jeet Tyagi, 89, a veteran of Gandhi's nonviolent protests against the British and a member of the high-caste clan that still wields the real power in this village, spoke of the rise of lower-caste politicians as a matter of "the donkeys taking over from the horses." Only later, when he was alone with visitors from outside the village, did Mr. Kumar speak up. "Can the donkeys do any worse than the horses?" he said.

In Kaithwari, there were many conversations with poorer villagers like the one with Mr. Kumar, suggesting that attitudes may be hardening. Watching television, among other things, has introduced the villagers to a wider world, and their comments sounded like a challenge to the country's politicians to begin the country's second half-century with a more determined effort to deliver on the vision of a better life held out to another generation of India's poor 50 years ago.

"When we sit in our homes at night, we see pictures on our television sets of the rich man's life, with cars, refrigerators, air-conditioners, everything we don't have," said Mohammed Rafiq, 28, a Muslim who makes his living selling vegetables. Mr. Rafiq held out what he said was his most treasured possession, a watch he bought for 120 rupees, about $3.40. And then he added: "So naturally we think: Why is it that God caused us to be born here? Is it our fate to live always as we do?"

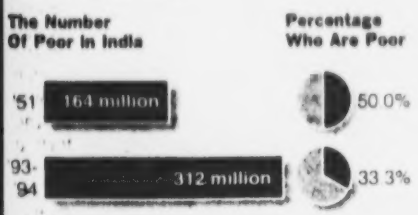
All figures are for 1995 except as noted.

Sources: World Bank, Government of India Economic Survey, The Military Balance 96-97, "India: From Midnight to the Millennium," by Shashi Tharoor; "The Statesman's Year-book: World Gazetteer"

Although the bejeweled maharajahs of British days have faded away, a new overclass in cities like Bombay, mostly politicians, business tycoons and mafia bosses, parade their wealth, inviting India's glossy magazines to palatial villas and to weddings that mimic the maharajahs' displays. While In-

Poverty in India

While the number of people living in poverty has risen, the percent of the total population in poverty has declined.



Source: World Bank

The New York Times

dia has many discreet philanthropists, some millionaires admit to having ventured no closer to a jhuggi than an airport highway.

But it has not been the concentration of wealth, so much as the failure to create more, that has mattered most. For this, it is common nowadays to blame Nehru, the first Prime Minister, who believed that Soviet-style style economics held the solution to ending poverty. Even before Gandhi was killed, Nehru had rejected his vision of India as a "village republic," with its future rooted in the welfare of its rural masses, and embarked on a rush to industrialize.

The result of Nehru's policies was a vast network of state-owned factories, and a stifling system known as the "license raj," with officials determining the products, prices and markets for the private enterprise that remained. The bureaucracy burgeoned into a national army of 60 million, notorious for its inefficiency and sloth. In time, Indian economists began speaking of the "Hindu rate of growth," a yearly increase in per capita income of about 1.5 per cent for the first three decades after 1947, as if something intrinsic to India condemned the country to economic stagnation.

A failure to control population compounded socialism's burdens. The number of Indians has nearly tripled since 1947, and continues to grow by 18 million a year. Although populous northern states like Uttar Pradesh, with 140 million people, have been reporting lower growth rates in recent years, the absence of effective government birth-control programs has put India on track to surpass China as the world's most populous nation sometime in the 21st century. By then, perhaps around 2025, India is expected to have a population of at least 1.3 billion.

The failure to control population growth is most often blamed on Nehru's daughter, Mrs. Gandhi, who encouraged a disastrous experiment with coerced sterilization during the Emergency of the 1970's that was overseen by her son Sanjay. The experiment ended with the collapse of Mrs. Gandhi's flirtation with dictatorship, but a lasting consequence of the popular anger has been that Indian politicians ever since ha[ve] ed birth-control programs as taboo.

Because national wealth has to [grow] more than the rate of population gr[owth] percent a year just to keep the [per capita] growing, the government's failure [to control] population has crippled its ability to [address] many of India's vast social problem[s], cially education, which many Indian[s] sider to be the key to all other prog[ress].

In the 1950 Constitution, the new rul[ers set] 1960 as the deadline for universal [primary] education, but government figures f[our] ades later show that 33 million chil[dren] school age, about one in three, have [never] been to school, and that about half [of all] students never reach secondary [school]. Women are worst affected, with a lit[eracy] rate of 39 per cent, against 64 per cent [for] men. At least 70 million Indian children under 16 end up in child labor.

Another legacy of the Nehru years is India's huge military establishment. Although reliable figures are hard to pin down, Western experts say that India's [armed] forces and a network of paramilitary [police] forces have a strength of at leas[t] million men, and cost more than $10 billion a year, as much as the Government spends on health and education combined. To this must be added the huge expense of India's covert programs to develop nuclear weapons, along with the missiles to carry them.

Although left-wing critics often complain that the country's military might betrays Gandhian principles of nonviolence, there is little dispute about the issue in mainstream Indian politics.

For one thing, the expense is justified by the need to confront Pakistan, especially in the disputed territory of Indian-held Kashmir, where a force of more than 500,000 Indian troops and police have been tied down by an insurgency backed by Pakistan. For another, Indian leaders have become increasingly concerned about the growing military might of China, although almost none ever say so publicly.

Partly because of the four decades of political dominance by three members of the Nehru family who served as Prime Minister — Nehru himself, who died in [1964], Mrs. Gandhi, assassinated by Sikh security guards in 1984, and her son, Rajiv Gandhi, assassinated by a Tamil terrorist from Sri Lanka in 1991 — their policies faced no major challenge until 1991, when Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, facing national bankruptcy, ordered socialism scrapped in favor of free markets, low tariffs, and foreign investment.

Although growth rates in the 1990's have zoomed beyond 7 percent, resistance from politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen accustomed to the comforts of the old system have blocked new changes needed to make the reformed economy work.

More than half the country's $350 billion annual output is still produced by state-owned companies. Almost none of the 20 million state employees have lost their jobs or been retrained for other work. With many foreign companies becoming disillusioned, foreign outside investment, less than $3 billion in 1996, has been far below that elsewhere in Asia, including China, which reports foreign investment of more than $40 billion a year.

The Future

Rising Expectations, In Cities and Villages

Even with these shortcomings, the economic reforms have produced a startling growth of the middle class. Indian economists argue about whether there are 30 million, 100 million, or even 150 million in the urban consumer class, but by any measure the Indian "yuppie" has become a pervasive fact of life, driving smart new cars, taking mortgages on the high-rise apartment buildings mushrooming beside every highway and griping about the quality of the cable systems that bring the Cable News Network or the ESPN sports channel into their homes.

While many university graduates used to head overseas to market their skills, now many are returning to exploit new opportunities in India.

A heart surgeon who returned to Ahmadabad last year from a thriving practice in California said he had come home for the sake of his children. "It's a shock readjusting to the heat and the dirt and the traffic, but having the kids back in their own culture is worth every bit of it," he said.

The rising expectations of the new middle class are one of the factors that are wearing down resistance to the economic reforms. Although left-wing politicians still denounce the "Westernization" of Indian culture, even they use mobile telephones. And even the leftists have been forced to recognize that ultimately there can be no turning back to the discredited socialism of the past. To even suggest it these days is to enrage many ordinary Indians who have to put up with the legacy of past mistakes.

—

The flaws of the old system show up in every sphere of life, with maddening consequences for rich and poor alike: In narrow, potholed highways choked with traffic that contribute to an annual road carnage of 65,000 deaths; in antiquated power plants that leave large areas of the country without power for hours, sometimes days, at a time; in hospitals with no medicines; in schools with no notebooks, pencils or chalk.

Many Indians contrast these conditions with progress elsewhere in Asia, where many countries that were as poor as India in 1947 have leapt to prosperity. Twenty-five years ago, most of these countries were no more advanced than India, but then the gap began to yawn. Some of these nations, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and South Korea, have achieved per capita incomes 10 to 20 times higher than India's $340 a year, along with literacy rates of 90 per cent and more. While some Indians dismiss such comparisons as unfair, because of the differences in the scale of the problems India faces, others say it is time to reject the rationalizations.

"As a 16-year-old in Bombay in 1947, I felt there was nothing to stop India from doing whatever it wanted," said S. L. Rao, an economist who has been an key adviser on the economic reforms of the 1990's. "But the fact is, we haven't delivered the people of India what we promised. We are far, far behind, and our only choice is to admit it,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A History of Hope, Achievement, Violence and Sadness

Reuters

Mohandas K. Gandhi with Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, and his wife, Edwina, shortly before independence.

AUG. 15, 1947 India and Pakistan gain their independence from Great Britain. Jawaharlal Nehru, leader of the Congress Party, the leading independence movement, becomes India's first Prime Minister.

OCT. 26, 1947 Facing an invasion from Pakistan, Kashmir's Hindu rulers agree to become part of India.

JAN. 30, 1948 Mohandas K. Gandhi is assassinated by a Hindu nationalist.

JAN. 26, 1950 India adopts a constitution, becoming the world's largest democracy.

APRIL 1951 A five-year economic plan to increase India's production of goods and services is adopted.

OCT. 1951-FEB. 1952 India holds its first national elections.

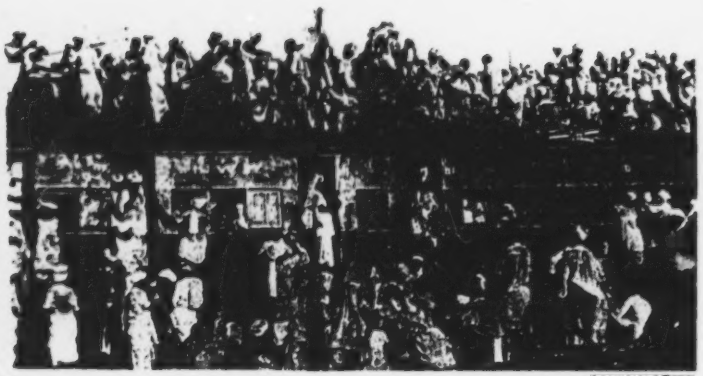
1955 India passes the Hindu Marriage Act, giving women the right to divorce. A year later, the Hindu Succession Act gives women equal rights to inherit property.

1961 India's third five-year plan is begun. At its completion India has

Sources: Stanley Wolpert, "A New History of India"; Percival Spear, "The Oxford History of Modern India"; Shashi Tharoor, "India from Midnight to the Millennium"

Porterfield/Chickering

Bombay is a commercial center, rapidly entering the era of computers and mobile telephones, to the point that the city makes a showy display of wealth. Yet the growth of a new middle class has not encompassed the homeless who sleep on the city's doorstep.



Associated Press

r independence, millions of Muslims and Hindus fled across the Pakistan-India ter, many on trains. Communal violence killed more than a million people

significantly increased its industrial production and agricultural output.

OCT.-NOV. 1962 India loses a border war with China.

MAY 27, 1964 Nehru dies.

APRIL 1965 India and Pakistan go to war over Kashmir without resolving the dispute.

JAN. 20, 1966 Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter, becomes Prime Minister of India.

NOV.-DEC. 1971 Agitation for independence in East Pakistan causes a refugee exodus into India. India goes to war with Pakistan on behalf of the rebels and Bangladesh emerges as an independent nation.

MAY 18, 1974 India tests a nuclear device.

JUNE 26, 1975 Indira Gandhi declares a state of emergency and suspends the constitution after being convicted of election fraud.

MAR. 16-20, 1977 Indira Gandhi voted out of office.

JAN. 1980 Indira Gandhi regains office.

JUNE 5, 1984 Indian troops attack the Golden Temple in Amritsar, saying it had become a fortified center for radical Sikh separatists Hundreds are killed.

OCT. 31, 1984 Two of Indira Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards assassinate her. In retaliation, thousands of Sikhs are killed by outraged Hindus. Later, Rajiv Gandhi, Indira's son, becomes Prime Minister.

DEC. 1, 1984 An accident at the Union Carbide chemical plant in Bhopal kills 2,000.

JULY 29, 1987 Rajiv Gandhi strike an agreement with Sri Lanka's president to use Indian troops to suppress a Tamil independence movement there.

MAY 21, 1991 Rajiv Gandhi is assassinated by a Tamil militant.

MAY 10, 1996 The Congress Party which had held power almost continuously since independence, suffers a devastating election loss.

Steve McCurry/Magnum

Women working at an electronics plant in Bangalore symbolize the economic transformation that is beginning to affect much of India. But competing Asian countries that were no more advanced than India 50 years ago have leaped beyond it to prosperity.

MAKING SENSE OF INDIA

It is the world's largest democracy and an emerging economic superpower, yet Americans care little about it. As India celebrates its golden anniversary, can't the United States find something to love? BY TONY CLIFTON

AT THE STROKE OF THE MIDNIGHT HOUR, WHEN the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom," Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru told an ecstatic nation on Aug. 15, 1947. "We end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself again." Weeks from the 50th anniversary of its independence, India finally has defined itself; the world's largest democracy will become one of its economic superpowers early next century. Yet Americans, who ponder their relationship with China and Russia, remain apathetic to the nearly 1 billion people who populate India. Who can name the nation's prime minister? Mention India, and Mother Teresa is more likely to come to mind, not its booming software business. It's a curious relationship. The two countries should be natural friends—both former British colonies, firm allies during two world wars. India's burdens may still be heavy—it is home to more than a third of the world's poor—but Nehru's heirs have kept the core promise: India remains a democracy. That accomplishment alone should have won Washington's admiration, if not love. But since 1947 the view from Washington has ranged from outright hostility to indifference. And among Indian bureaucrats and intellectuals, suspicion that Washington is maneuvering against New Delhi has hardened into reflex. How could that be, if the countries really stand for what they claim?

The forces of history at midcentury dashed any hope of a love affair. Nehru toiled to found a socialist utopia just as the start of the cold war had Washington dividing the world into friends and enemies. India willfully defied categorization. In the name of neutrality, Nehru declined America's invitations to help build a regional bulwark against Soviet expansion, a position John Foster Dulles once called "immoral and shortsighted." Nehru sent the brilliantly acerbic V. K. Krishna Menon to the U.N.; after one meeting, President Eisenhower called him "a menace and a boor." To Washington, neutrality meant keeping quiet; India instead formulated its own moral stands. For America, a country that feels a need to cloak foreign policy in moral righteousness, that may have been the ultimate affront.

Geopolitics, including the touchy issue of nuclear proliferation, shredded what good will remained after the early years. The nadir was 1971, when President Richard Nixon "tilted" toward India's archrival, Pakistan, seeking an opening toward Pakistan's ally, China. Still, Washington often helped India—openly by donating food, covertly by building the campaign chests of such favored politicians as Indira Gandhi. The payoff was small. "They're not grateful enough," said a U.S. ambassador late one night in a flash of candor. The hostility was mutual. S. K. Singh, once India's top diplomat, called his U.S. counterparts "absolutely ruthless in pursuing their self-interest." Nixon was the last U.S. president to officially visit New Delhi.

Now the cold war is over, and India again has rediscovered itself—as a champion of market capitalism. And hostility, though deeply rooted in the two countries' bureaucracies, may be eroding. Since India reformed its investment laws in 1991, U.S. companies have poured in up to a billion dollars a year. Indians now can watch MTV and "The Bold and the Beautiful." They eat Big Macs (made from lamb) and Kentucky Fried Chicken, and buy their kids Reeboks and Nikes. Upper-class Indians who used to school their children in England now look to American universities. More of them than ever are visiting the United States—and 355,000 immigrated between 1985 and 1995. There now are a million Indian-Americans, and they've begun to assert themselves politically, as befits one of the country's most affluent immigrant groups. Indians are learning the game. And two thin-skinned democracies may yet realize that their shared values far outweigh their differences.

With TOM MASLAND *in New*

As a new nation, India insisted on doing things its way: *The Maharajah of Baria's wedding in 1948*

HENRI CARTIER BRESSON – MAGNUM

A NEW TIGER

India used to pride itself on poverty-stricken self-sufficiency. Now it seeks growth, exports and foreign investment, and the economy is booming.

By Steven Strasser and Sudip Mazumdar

TRAVEL INTO THE DEPTHS OF Bihar, India's poorest state, along the dirt paths that connect its stagnant pools of humanity, past government signs touting chimerical health and education programs, into the hopeless heart of a subcontinent where the squalid villages might remind you of sub-Saharan Africa—except that the poorest Africans fare better than the destitute of Bihar. Eventually you will stumble onto the village of Kalipahari, blessed with electricity thanks to a nearby hydroelectric dam. Here you will see, in practically every hovel, an incongruous sight: a television set, pulling down American soap operas and Scotch whisky ads from Hong Kong. This is the Indian dream at ground level. As the vision of "Baywatch" filters through Bihar, so even the poorest of the poor finally begin to rise from the depths of rotted isolation.

And so does poor old India. For 50 years the national identity has depended on isolation from perceived enemies—from plotting neocolonialists in the West, from greedy multinational companies, even from those intrepid Indians who resisted the official creed of self-sufficiency. But now satellite TV has come to Bihar, and Coca-Cola, too. Health and education will one day follow. The leaders in New Delhi have a new national ideal—rapid growth—and, at least in spirit, they have thrown open the doors to multinationals everywhere. More important, they are forging a national identity more suited to modern times. India, at last, has begun to see itself as another Asian nation dedicated to the accumulation of wealth and the spread of prosperity. In the next century that vision will hold infinitely more power than the old asceticism. "Perhaps our industrialization is not complete," says Srini Rajam, head of the Texas Instruments branch in booming Bangalore, "but we can leapfrog into the Information Age."

India has always had pride. Now it has ambition. In the early years of independence, Jawaharlal Nehru's government rejoiced in standing apart, the epitome of the "nonaligned" nation. As a conglomeration of peoples with seven major religions and 18 official languages, India made its own rules: a democracy on a continent ruled by despots, a planned economy whose bureaucratic stewards were satisfied to creep along at a 3 or 4 percent "Hindu rate of

growth." Only when the New Delhi elite squarely acknowledged that its hubris had put the nation on the sidelines of the global economy—while India's great rival China was getting rich—did real reforms begin. Now, six years into India's opening to the world, the economy is growing by nearly 7 percent a year, a rate that by 2020 will transform its economy into the world's fourth largest (after China, the United States and Japan). "There is a lot of political cacophony," says Finance Minister P. Chidambaram, who has served under two coalition governments in the last 14 months. "But we are on course."

There is no lilt to his optimism. A visitor to urban China (which is churning along at a growth rate of 9.5 percent a year) can almost hear the hum of enterprise in a nation that is fairly bursting to build a better life. The reformers of India, by contrast, tend to bow under the weight of their nation's great poverty. Even now, 52 percent of their people still live on incomes of less than $1 a day, according to World Bank figures. Nearly two thirds of Indian children younger than 5 are malnourished, and those who reach school age can count on an average of only 3.5 years of education if they are boys, 1.5 if they are girls. By the time they reach adulthood, half are still illiterate. Think of it: India is trying to accelerate onto the Information Superhighway with nearly 300 million adults who cannot read road signs.

Pride: *Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi (left) preached self-reliance in the early days*

Ambition: *A modern Indian uses a cellular phone before a Gandhi mural in New Delhi*

Comparisons between India and the economic tigers of East Asia are equally dismal. Pacific Rim economies that once ranked far below India and its South Asian neighbors now enjoy per capita incomes 27 times greater, according to the Human Development Centre, a Pakistani think tank that studies regional economic trends. The blunt reality of India's failures is now driving its reforms, and most Indians agree on what must be done. From the Marxists running Calcutta to the Hindu nationals running Bombay (they call it Mumba the bywords of the new Inc are growth, foreign inve ment and, most hallowed all, exports.

The strategy, formed 1991 by the then prime min ter P. V. Narasimha Rao a his finance minister, Mann han Singh, was ruthlessly si ple: to dismantle the stifl bureaucracy that once ruled India as int sively as Moscow's planners once ran Soviet Union. Rao and Singh cut much the bureaucracy's "license raj" of red ta then went on to simplify taxes, reduce scope of the state sector (which provi everything from power to motor scoote liberalize foreign investment and cut iffs. From the earliest days, says Sir "our goal has been to show the world India can compete with any country Southeast Asia in our hospitality to inv ment and our spirit of enterprise."

India's culture has also been a force

STOMA (LEFT); MARCUS OLENIAK—IPOL

The three R's: *Students in Mumbai's Dharavi district, Asia's worst slum (above)*

The Raj: *In the heyday of British rule, the Prince of Wales (center) kills a tiger*

reaching out to the world. The film industry turns out both masterpieces and tawdry B movies in astonishing profusion. Using the imported English language in their own unique way, novelists like Arundhati Roy, 37, a former actress and screenwriter, have become international best sellers. The literary tradition has deep roots; Hindu poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore won the Nobel Prize in Literature as long ago as 1913.

Neither culture nor industry has done anything yet for the dregs of Indian society, the 200 million or so people at the very bottom of the ladder. But for the first time in history, economic growth and the spread of communications are working a revolution among many millions of India's other poor. New Delhi's program of teaming with foreign investors to string out copper wire for telephones is proceeding in fits and starts. Even in the capital, the wait for a new phone can still stretch to three years. Nonetheless, the government's decision to let in foreign satellite television has led to an explosion of more than 20 million cable-TV connections within the last two years. That alone has helped to spur demand among low-income consumers to unprecedented levels. A manufacturer of $1.20 bottles of shampoo for middle-class Indians found a huge new market for two-cent packets of the brand in poor areas. The race is on to produce cheap television sets and appliances. One entrepreneur found a way to convert devices for making *lassi* (a yogurt drink) into cheap washing machines. And the first developer of a good $50 refrigerator, suggests economist S. L. Rao, would now find a huge new market in rural India.

More important, India's poor are beginning to find their political voice. Indian democracy has always been hobbled by the primitive state of its grass-roots politics. Too many local leaders bubbled up to national power on their ability to buy votes and deliver favors—and subsequently used their national platforms mainly to enrich themselves. But the rural awakening that came with reform also has revived state and local politics. State competition for the spoils of reform is now common. Tamil Nadu attracted a Ford plant by waiving state sales taxes and offering land at a concessionary price. Uttar Pradesh won the battle to lure an electronics project set up by the Korean giant Daewoo.

The southern city of Bangalore, India's Silicon Valley, stands as the glittering tiara of the new India. Indians themselves own only 1.8 million installed personal computers—about a third the number in New York City. But what the info-tech companies stand for is vitally important

Colonialism on the March

India wasn't content to remain a colony; the seeds of its independence were sown less than 30 years after the British took over.

The Brits battle for India

1757 The British East India Company gains control of Bengal after Lt. Col. Robert Clive defeats French and Mogul forces

1858 After a century of growing influence on the Subcontinent, the British government takes direct control of India

1885 The Indian National Congress is formed and pushes, with increasing stridency, for a greater Indian voice in government

Early days

1906 Muslims establish the Muslim League to defend their interests against the Hindu majority

1920 Mahatma Gandhi takes over the Congress and presses for 'nonviolent disobedience'

1935 The British government approves a constitution that gives Indians more political power

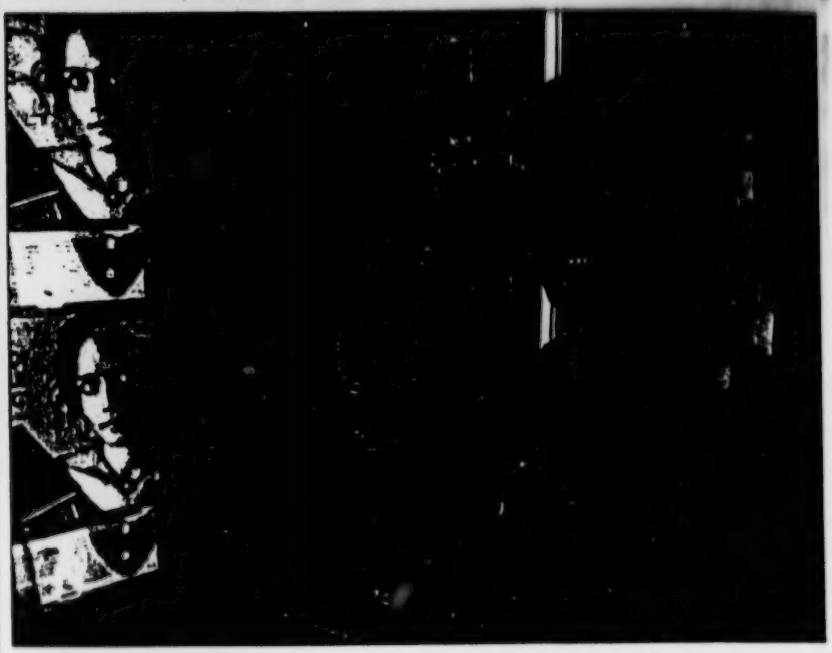
A British duke and a staffer go hunting

1940 The Muslim League demands that a separate Muslim country, Pakistan, be carved out of India

1942 The Congress party passes the 'Quit India' resolution, calling on the Brits to leave the country; Gandhi is imprisoned

Gandhi

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ROBERT WALLIS – SABA, PA NEWS, CORBIS – BETTMANN (2), HULTON GETTY, CORBIS – BETTMANN



The homegrown firms and those allied with all the big names, from IBM to Intel, have exuberantly cut through red tape and protectionism, welcoming competition while becoming successful software exporters themselves. "If we can't compete with international brands in our own country, we can't hope to ever compete in other countries," says software-industry spokesman Dewang Mehta.

As India streamlines its bureaucracy and unclogs its courts, New Delhi and Mumbai may become more attractive to multinational corporations than the regulatory wilds of Beijing and Shanghai. If India can mobilize its hundreds of millions of young, cheap workers at a time when the work force of the developed world is aging, a boom of Chinese magnitude might not be out of the question. "Just think of the economic output we can generate from this population when our per capita income of $330 doubles early in the next century," says Mukesh Ambani, vice chairman of Mumbai's Reliance Industries. "That will clearly boost us into range of becoming an economic superpower."

Somehow the mantle of "superpower" does not quite fit the personality of a huge, poor country that will continue to regard itself, culturally and politically, as the world's great exception. Nor will India likely become a classic Asian tiger. As a vibrant democracy that must always tend to its own first, the nation will never produce a Deng Xiaoping to dictate its strategy from on high. The new Indian dynamo will muddle along, sure of its direction but never of its strategy, obsessed always with the myriad demands from within. "We will take one sector at a time, show that it works and build confidence," says Manmohan Singh. "There can be no big-bang theory of growth."

Hindu verse: *Nobel Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore (left) in 1905*

Best-selling fiction: *Arundhati Roy, author of 'The God of Small Things'*

An outsider can gauge India's progress by measuring the market's success at shifting resources to the government's neediest constituents—something the centralized bureaucracy never could accomplish. How will life change in the most desolate regions of Bihar? At the absolute end of the line, in the village of Devnagra, a foreign donor recently gave $7,000 for a new well, the kind of gesture that short-circuits India's inefficiencies (to put it politely) rather than validating reform. Nonetheless, once fresh water comes to the village, it will be less hard to imagine a school, a clinic, even a road—and along that road, a thin copper wire connecting the darkest corner of India to the riches of the world.

With RON MOREAU *in Mumbai,* TONY CLIFTON *in New Delhi and* JOSHUA KWAN *in Hong Kong*

The Fall of the Union Jack

After a turbulent beginning, India has transformed itself from a British colony into the world's largest democracy.

Nehru

1947 India gains independence one day after Pakistan is created; Nehru becomes prime minister

1947-49 India and Pakistan fight over Kashmir on the China border

1948 Gandhi, on his way to an evening prayer meeting, is shot to death by a Hindu extremist

1966 In a compromise, the left and right wings of the Congress party name Indira Gandhi India's first woman prime minister

Indira Gandhi

1971 India assists East Pakistan in winning a war against West Pakistan. East Pakistan becomes Bangladesh.

Pakistani POWs

1974 India explodes its first nuclear device underground, but denies it has plans to build nuclear weapons

1984 Indira Gandhi is assassinated by a Sikh. A Union Carbide gas leak in Bhopal kills 2,000 people.

Bhopal victims

1991 Rajiv Gandhi, Indira's son and successor, is assassinated

1996 The Congress party, India's longtime ruling party, is defeated

Mourning at Rajiv's cremation

LEFT TO RIGHT, TOP: VITHALBHAI COL—DPA-SIPA; PABLO BARTHOLOMEW—GAMM
LEFT TO RIGHT, BOTTOM: CORBIS-BETTMANN; BOCCON GIBOD—SIPA; ARCHIVE PHOTOS
FRANCE; ERIC BOUVET—MATRIX; JAT ULLAL—DAS FOTOARCHIV—BLACK STAR

From the Old to the New

Fifty years after independence, India is redefining itself. Some changes are overdue, others worrisome. All are unstoppable. BY FAREED ZAKARIA

IT IS SURELY ONE OF the great speeches of the century. India's Gettysburg Address. Jawaharlal Nehru's stirring announcement of Indian independence was, like Abraham Lincoln's speech, a consecration of both victory and tragedy (about as many died in India's bloody partition as did in the Civil War), and, like Lincoln's, it gave voice to a new nation. Nehru saw Aug. 15, 1947, as a watershed, marking the end of two centuries of European dominion and the rebirth of an ancient civilization: "A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance."

On reading these words now, however, one is struck by how much better they apply to India today than they did 50 years ago. During the past decade, India has been rediscovering herself, casting off a mantle designed abroad for one more distinctly homespun. As the nation moves into the 21st century it will in all likelihood be less socialist, less secular, less centralized and less Anglicized than it has been since independence.

It is often remarked that Nehru was the last Englishman to rule India. He was indeed a product of England's great institutions—Harrow, Cambridge, the London bar—but Nehru spent many more years in His Majesty's prisons than in his schools. He was, above all, an Indian nationalist. But his conception of nationalism was entirely European, a product of Enlightenment ideas about self-determination, liberalism and rationalism in politics. He and his generation of "freedom fighters" created a new India that was secular, democratic and republican, with a strong, centralized state that defined the nation and directed, in a socialist fashion, its economic development. It was a model an English Labour Party leader could have created.

In the past 10 years the founding conception of Indian nationalism—embodied by the Congress party—has been steadily eroded by what V. S. Naipaul has called "a million little mutinies": Hindu pride, lower-caste empowerment, a rising bourgeoisie, regional assertiveness. Perhaps the most powerful of these forces are capitalism and religion—an unlikely combination.

For 40 years India's mixed economy was famously inefficient. One of the saddest of many sad statistics: in 1986 the Steel Authority of India employed 247,000 people to produce 6 million tons of steel while South Korea's privately owned Pohan Steel paid 10,000 people to make 14 million tons. But things have changed. The liberalization and free-market reforms of 1991 have unleashed a market revolution. India's private sector is growing by leaps and bounds. The quality and quantity of goods available to consumers and businesses have shot up. Foreign investment is moving in slowly but steadily. Whether or not India grows fast enough to become another "Asian tiger" (about 7 percent a year is the magic number), capitalism is already remaking India's economy and, perhaps more important, its society.

The effects are striking. Visit a city or town in India and *everybody* is on the make. People who once sought government jobs, with security and low salaries, now look for business opportunities, franchises and financing. A society that has, for thousands of years, honored the status of the state, of princes and of caste now exalts the market.

It is no coincidence that just as the socialist basis of India's nationalism is being challenged, so is its secularism. The two are part of the same old order. The years since 1992 have seen the rise of a powerful Hindu nationalist party, the destruction of mosques and religious riots. Perhaps most important, it has become acceptable to articulate a Hindu fundamentalism unthinkable 25 years ago. The danger of religious conflict haunted India's founding generation. (Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu fanatic who felt betrayed by Gandhi's "appeasement" of the Muslims.) Indira Gandhi amended the preamble to the Indian Constitution to add the word "secular" to its description of the state. That ideal seems far away today. Outside of a highly cosmopolitan, urban elite, the younger generation of Hindus and Muslims seem less committed to integration than their parents.

The old order has yielded; it cannot be rebuilt. But how India casts off its old garb will determine its future. It needs a new economics, but also the old tolerance. Perhaps it will achieve both. "India: From Midnight to the Millennium," Shashi Tharoor recalls that Nehru described India as "an ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously." Building a modern country upon an ancient civilization: that is India's challenge for the 21st century.

STEVE MCCURRY - MAGNUM

Capitalism has put the nation back on track: *Passing a breakfast tray along a train*

India's Odd, Enduring Patchwork

By Shashi Tharoor

A year ago, when India celebrated the 49th anniversary of its independence from British rule, H. D. Deve Gowda, then the Prime Minister, stood at the ramparts of New Delhi's 16th-century Red Fort and delivered the traditional Independence Day address to the nation in Hindi, India's "national language."

Eight other prime ministers had done exactly the same thing 48 times before, but what was unusual this time was that Mr. Gowda, a southerner from the state of Karnataka, spoke to the country in a language of which he scarcely knew a word. Tradition and politics required a speech in Hindi, so he gave one — the words having been written out for him in his native Kannada script, in which they, of course, made no sense.

Such an episode is almost inconceivable elsewhere, but it represents the best of the oddities that help make India India. Only in India could a country be ruled by a man who does not understand its "national language." Only in India, for that matter, is there a "national language" half the population does not understand. And only in India could this particular solution be found to enable the Prime Minister to address his people.

One of Indian cinema's finest singers, K. J. Yesudas, sang his way to the top of the Hindi music charts with lyrics in that language written in the Malayalam script for him, but to see the same practice elevated to the prime ministerial address on Independence Day was a startling affirmation of Indian pluralism.

We are all minorities in India. A typical Indian stepping off a train, a Hindi-speaking Hindu man from the Gangetic plain state of Uttar Pradesh, might cherish the illusion that he represents the "majority community," to use an expression much favored by the less industrious of our majority there is not even male.

Hindu he belongs to the faith adhered to by some 82 percent of the population, but a majority of the country does not speak Hindi, a majority does not hail from Uttar Pradesh, and if he were visiting, say, the state of Kerala, he would discover that a

> In 50 years, we've seen the evils of pluralism. Now let's praise it.

Worse, this archetypal Hindu has only to mingle with the polyglot, polychrome crowds thronging any of India's main railway stations to realize how much of a minority he really is. Even his Hinduism is no guarantee of majorityhood, because his caste automatically places him in a minority as well. If he is a Brahmin, 90 percent of his fellow Indians are not; if he is a Yadav (one of the intermediate castes), 85 percent of Indians are not, and so on.

Or take language. The Constitution of India recognizes 17 languages today, but in fact there are 35 Indian languages, each spoken by more than a million people — and these are languages with their own scripts, grammatical structures and cultural assumptions, not just dialects (and if we're to count dialects, there are more than 22,000).

No language enjoys majority status in India. Thanks in part to the popularity of Bombay's cinema, Hindi is understood, if not always well spoken, by nearly half the population of India, but it is in no sense the language of the majority. Indeed, its locutions, gender rules and script are unfamiliar to most Indians in the south or northeast.

Ethnicity further complicates the matter. Most of the time, an Indian's name immediately reveals where he is from and what his mother tongue are advertising our origins. Despite some intermarriage among the elites in the cities, Indians still largely remain endogamous, and a Bengali is easily distinguished from a Punjabi.

Such differences among Indians often are stronger than what they may have in common. A Brahmin from Karnataka shares his Hindu faith with a Kurmi from Bihar, but the two diverge completely when it comes to physical appearance, dress, social customs, food, language and political objectives.

At the same time, a Tamil Hindu would feel that he has far more in common with a Tamil Christian or Muslim than with, say, a Jat from Haryana with whom he formally shares the Hindu religion.

So pluralism emerges from the very nature of the country; it is a choice made inevitable by India's geography, reaffirmed by its history and reflected in its ethnography. Indian nationalism is a rare animal indeed. It is not based on language (since we have at least 17 or 35, depending on whether you follow the Constitution or the ethnolinguists)

> A country with 35 languages has its own definition of unity.

It is not based on geography. (The "natural" frontiers of India have been hacked by the partition of 1947.) It is not based on ethnicity. (Indian Bengalis and Punjabis, for instance, have more in common with Bangladeshis and Pakistanis than with other Indians.) And it is not based on religion. (We are home to almost every faith known to mankind, and Hinduism — a religion without a national organization, established church or ecclesiastical hierarchy — exemplifies our diversity more than our common cultural heritage.) Indian idea, the idea of an ever-ever land that is greater than the sum of its contradictions.

This land imposes no narrow conformities on its citizens; you can be many things and one thing. You can be a good Muslim, a good Keralite and a good Indian all at once.

So the idea of India is of one land embracing many. It is the idea that a nation may accommodate differences of caste, creed, color, culture, cuisine, costume and custom, and still be a nation — so long as democracy insures that none of these differences are decisive in determining an Indian's opportunities.

Our founding fathers wrote a constitution that gave passports to their ideals, but violent secessionism has plagued several border states, as some minority groups, like Assam and Punjab, have sought to subtract themselves from the Indian ideal on religious, regional or ethnic grounds.

Some of these troubles continue, but in a land of minorities, no struggle affects all Indians. The power of electoral numbers has been able to lessen caste discrimination. Indeed, last month, for the first time, an "untouchable" was elected as President of India.

For the rest of the world, wary of the endless multiplication of sovereignties, hesitant before the clamor for self-determination echoing in a hundred different dialects, anxious about murderous new fundamentalisms and unconvinced that every sub-nationality is worthy of support, there may be something to be said for the Indian idea.

If the overwhelming majority of a people share the political will for unity, if they wear the dust of a shared history on their foreheads and the mud of an uncertain future on their feet, and if they realize they are better off living in Kozhikode or Kanpur dreaming the same dreams as those in Kohlapur or Kohima, a nation exists, celebrating diversity and freedom. That is the India that has emerged in the last 50 years, and it is well worth celebrating. □

Shashi Tharoor is the author of "The Great Indian Novel" and "India: From Midnight to the Millennium."

Growth of violence has been phenomena

By Hiranmay Karlekar

—ifty years after independence, violence
—affects almost every Indian —its perpe-
trators and victims directly; others indi-
tly in the form of a feeling of insecurity
thanks partly to the communications
volution. Newspapers and magazines rein-
ce, with accounts, increasingly graphic,
image of death and destruction the idiot
x brands one's consciousness with. The
dia, however, could not have sustained an
-pervasive feeling of insecurity without a
utually reinforcing dialectic between the
ter and violence, which has grown rapidly.

As Erich Fromm shows in his *Fear of eedom*, a feeling of insecurity leads to sa-
stic or masochistic behaviour. The former
mprises attempts to bolster one's self by
minating or manipulating others physically
d/or psychologically. Masochistic behav-
ur is surrendering one's self —physically
d/or psychologically —to a superior being
entity and deriving a feeling of security
m the latter.

Attempts at sadistic domination over other
dividuals often cause violence. At the col-
ctive level, these lead to the rise of organi-
tions like Hitler's Sturmabteilung (SA) and
e kind of violence he unleashed on Ger-
any and the world. Masochism induces sur-
nder to sadistic domination. In India, the
terplay of sadism and masochism contrib-
es to both individual crime and the rise of
talitarian mass organisations like the Shiv
ena and the various terrorist and insurgent
roups.

The dialectic between violence and the
eling of insecurity is a legacy of history
hich has been given an especially destruc-
ve character by the post-independence pat-
rn of economic development. Despite the
achings of Gautam Buddha and Mahavira
e influence of the Bhakti cult and Sufism,
nd Mahatma Gandhi's more recent empha-
s on non-violence, the Indian psyche has
aditionally glorified violence associated
ith heroism and the defence of virtue.
evolutionary violence and terrorism were
auded during the freedom movement, and
y Marxists and Marxist-Leninists after In-
dependence.

Nor has India had a particularly non-violent history. Independence itself came with Partition and a deluge of communal violence. Partly overlapping with it were the peasant uprisings in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal led by the Communist Party of India. Earlier, Mahatma Gandhi's insistence on non-violence notwithstanding, violence and repressing had marked the freedom struggle, and not merely the terrorist strand of it. Besides, periodic Hindu Muslim riots had followed the increasing communalisation of Indian politics since the seventies of the 19th century. Socially, omnipresent violence supported oppressive and exploitative feudal relations in India's vast rural hinterland.

The post-Independence pattern of development has aggravated the old sources of conflict and created new ones. It has extended the government's functions to the running of enterprises —some of them monopolies —providing telephone services, domestic electricity or running airlines, shipping companies, banks and insurance units and even hotels. Simultaneously, the traditional administrative structure comprising the secretariat, district administration and the local self-governing bodies has expanded and diversified. Despite frequent conflicts between those manning the traditional and extended structures of administration, large sections of both have become allies in extortion and corruption. They constitute the plundering, exploitative strata akin to the "new class" in the erstwhile communist countries which, in the words of Milovan Djilas, "may be said to have been made up of those who have special privilege and economic preference because of the administrative monopoly they hold". The distinctive feature of the Indian variety is its special privilege of extorting money from people for releasing goods, services or facilities under their monopoly control and stealing government funds.

Resentment against the corrupt and extortionist new class has been particularly intense because of its generally insulting behaviour towards people which reflects its colonial administrative ethos. More serious in its implications, however, is its alliance with the political and economic vested interests which shower its members with bribes and favours. This makes it a partisan intervener in social and economic conflicts, and the latter particularly violent. In rural areas a major source of such conflicts has been the prosperity created by the Green Revolution which has heightened disparities and enhanced the premium on landowning. This has intensified movements by landless and poor peasants —mostly Dalits and members of the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) —for

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A TIMES OF INDIA DEBATE

land and higher agricultural wages. The resultant clashes with landlords and rich peasants —belonging mostly to the upper castes and the affluent OBCs —have often assumed the character of caste confrontations. The states most severely affected are Bihar and Andhra Pradesh where Marxist and Marxist-Leninist parties are active. The violence is often particularly savage in conflicts involving Dalits and OBC landlords, most of whom, beneficiaries of the inadequate land reforms effected, demand from the Dalits the feudal obeisance the upper castes once commanded. This the awakened Dalits are unwilling to extend.

Industrialisation has spurred urbanisation. Migrant villagers tend to feel insecure in the unfamiliar environs of cities. Sans their identities in their villages and generally ignored in the impersonal urban milieu, they are frequently oppressed by a feeling of anonymity and inconsequentiality. For them violence —often criminal —is a desperate, subconscious assertion of both self and existence, which is facilitated by the absence of the social restraints operating on them in the villages. They —as also marginalised urban elements —tend to associate with militant mass organisations which remove their feeling of insecurity and lend them a collective identity and a feeling of power and self-esteem.

A proliferation of militant mass organisations and the violence they unleash has followed. Increasingly aggressive political mobilisation along religious caste, class, ethnic, linguistic and regional lines for governmental power, which apportions the fruits of state led development has helped the process. This aggravated social cleavages as exemplified by the vicious turn given to caste relations and communal ties by Mandal and Mandir politics respectively. Along with uneven geographical distribution of development it has also spawned movements like those for separate Uttarakhand and Bodo states. The resultant violence often becomes explosive because of the accumulation of latent aggression in people through repeated exposure to humiliation and injustice from government functionaries and other exploiters. The violence that erupted at Ghatkopar, Bombay on July 12 following an insult to B R Ambedkar's statue, is an example of this.

Even when there is no explosion, latent aggression causes combative behaviour or intensifies subconscious hatred formation against individuals or groups. It also leads to association with terrorist and insurgent organisations whose violent ideologies strike a chord in people smouldering within. Terrorism threatens to revisit Punjab, insurgency continues in northeastern India and —despite some improvement in the situation — in Jammu and Kashmir. Marxist-Leninist organisations clash regularly with the private armies of landlords and the security forces in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. Whether rooted in rural exploitation as in Bihar and Andhra

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THURSDAY, JULY 31, 1997

Pradesh —or stoked from outside as in Jammu and Kashmir —insurgency and terrorism reflect alienation not only from the administration and the entrenched socio-economic order but India's political system. Parliamentary democracy has failed to deliver rapidly enough; politics has become criminalised and debased.

Latent aggression also frequently gives a vicious turn to violence accompanying crime which has increased alarmingly because of industrialisation, urbanisation and the spreading consumer culture. The craving for consumer goods leads to robbery, theft, dacoity, murder, white collar crimes like frauds and scams, dowry demands and bride killing when the loot is considered inadequate. Dowry deaths underline a crucial fact: women have been the principal victims of the violence engendering social changes which have occurred. Rape has increasingly been an instrument of terrorisation and vengeance in rural caste and class conflicts. Feelings of insecurity and frustration have been major causes of escalating domestic violence. Women family members of male migrants to cities have been rendered vulnerable. In cities, sexual frustration among migrant males has increased the incidence of rape and molestation, which have also received a fillip from Bollywood films and soft-porn South Indian movies glorifying eve-teasing and projecting women as sex objects. Commodification of women by advertising has also contributed to these trends.

In the developed countries centuries of turmoil has produced a balance of power and interests between social strata and institutional arrangements for conflict resolution resting on consensus. India is undergoing a dual transition —a readjustment of social equations and emergence into modernity. Relations between social formations and conflict resolving institutions are in a flux, as are values and legitimising authorities. A blinkered strategy of development and an utterly bankrupt political leadership have only stoked conflict and violence.

● *Hiranmay Karlekar is a senior journalist and a former editor of The Hindustan Times.*

OP-ED

New Delhi
THE PIONEER
8-1-97

Subaltern politics

Segmentation has always been the driving force of politics in the country, says Pothik Ghosh

The sublime may merely be a step away from the ridiculous. But it has taken almost 50 years for the members of the "hallowed" Indian polity to recognise that a united nation state called India is an absurd proposition vis-a-vis a fragmented society and polity.

Segmentation has always been the driving force of politics in this country. However, our leaders have always chosen to depict ground realities otherwise. It is high time now for them to admit that their patriotic and syncretic slogans like "Unity in diversity" do not cut much ice these days.

The transformation of the Bharatiya Janata Party has been the most astounding political development in this regard. Despite its rhetoric of Hindutva, the BJP has failed to prevent itself from being drawn into a cesspool of caste politics. The party, which had thrived on upper caste, petty bourgeois Hindu sentiments of political discipline and social order, relented in the course of time to the pressure of caste politics. Its idea of India as a monolithic Hindu nation state has started showing chinks.

Time, it seems, is up for patriotically clenched fists and hearts pounding with nationalist fervour. A strong sense of community is parochial alright, but relates better with nationalism and a united nation state. Politics of caste, on the other hand, is essentially anti-nation state.

That the BJP would give up its nationalist (read Hindutva) plank and play its cards according to the ever-changing caste alignments, of Hindi heartland in general and Uttar Pradesh in particular, was simply unimaginable at one point of time.

But it has happened. The first signal of change was when it decided to ally with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) this year despite the fiasco with which its first entente met, in 1995. The Chitrakoot conclave of the party held from July 9-12, primarily reviewed the party's ties with the Dalits. The remarkable feature of the meet, however, was the presence of Suresh Ketkar, a top RSS functionary. The Rashtriya Swyamsewak Sangh (RSS) has also surprisingly been a party to the casteisation of the BJP.

In fact, in a meeting held a week before the Chitrakoot conclave, in Delhi, the Sangh proclaimed that it wanted to share power with the Dalits as this would marginalise OBC leaders like Laloo Yadav and Mulayam Yadav.

What makes the situation even more interesting is that UP, which has traditionally been the nationalistic ambitions of the Congress, should be the stage on which the drama of anti-nation state subaltern politics is being played. Ironically, the BJP's acceptance of fragmentary caste politics also began in UP.

The BJP has at last come to terms with the fact that its homogenous nationalist pantheon consisting of Shivaji, Gandhi, Subhash Chandra Bose, Veer Savarkar and Bhagat Singh (their subtle ideological and political differences notwithstanding), no longer works. This is reflected in its alliance with the BSP, a representative of the subalterns. The former has also, sort of, approved the invention of lower caste icons like Chatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj and Raja Bijli Pasi. It has given a nod to an anti-nation state discourse espoused by Mayawati and her ilk. Raja Bijli Pasi, for instance, was glorified, in a BSP rally held on July 1, 1997 at Lucknow, against the traditional Rajput heroes Aalha and Udal.

The BJP has gone all out for the Dalit cause at the cost of losing its backward constituency. It has put off Kalyan Singh, its leader of the back-

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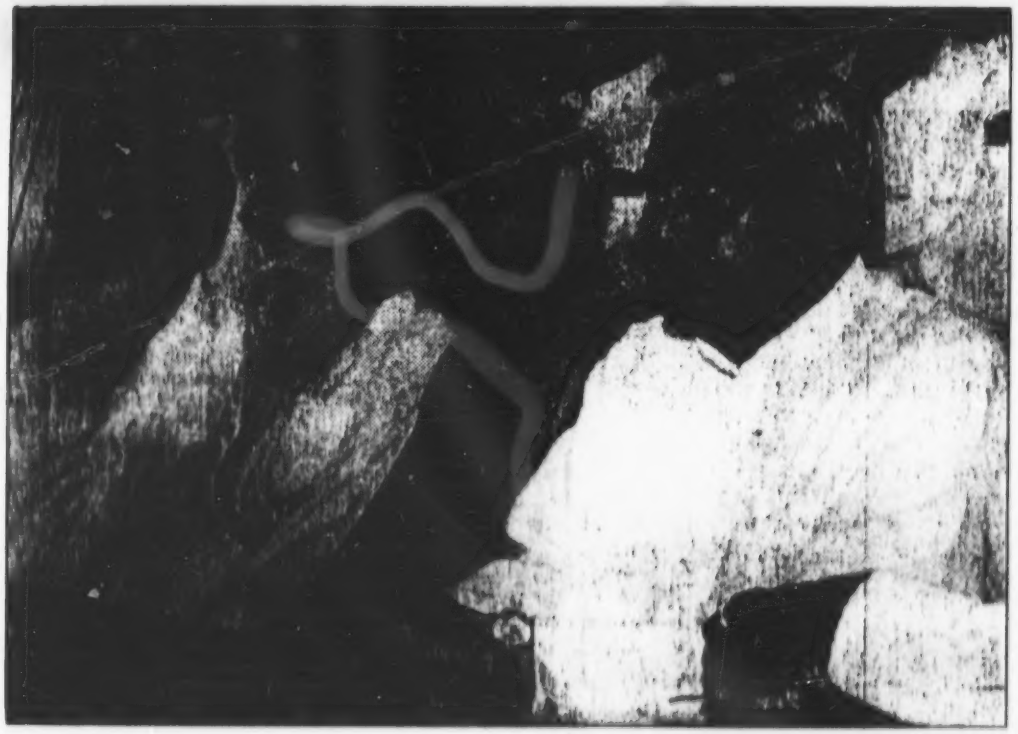
Nationalism, we discover, has always been an alien concept for our society. The unifying homogenous discourse of nationalist history of the freedom struggle invented by the Congress, and then followed more or less in the same way by the Bharatiya Janata Party, does not give a complete picture of the Indian historical reality. Their ideology of nationalism has egg on its face



wards (Lodhs) and has antagonised Mulayam Singh who heads the most powerful backward caste in UP — the Yadavs. Mulayam Singh and his tribe have, on the other hand, moved closer to the upper castes. The much-touted grand unity of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the Other Backward Castes lies in a shambles. Once a messiah of all the oppressed castes, he is now crying himself hoarse over the misuse of the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act and is demanding its abolition.

This was imminent. OBCs, as opposed to the SCs and STs, have been in keen competition with the upper castes. Thus once the UP Yadavs under Mulayam Singh achieved their political status they automatically moved away from the SCs and STs, who are classic subalterns.

These changes have taken UP somewhat back to its pre-Mandal caste alliance of AJGR (Ahir, Jat, Gujjar and Rajput). UP became a battlefield of politics of the fragmentary kind long ago. First it was the emergence of the Jats under Charan Singh as a third force, followed by the Congress alliance of KHAM (Khsatriya, Harijan, Adivasi, Muslim) under Indira Gandhi in 1971 which was supposed to be an answer to the Jat supremo.

As for the BJP's transformation, history has repeated itself. The monolithic and homogenous discourse of nationalism on which the Congress survived till 1971 has simply been appropriated by the BJP, only communalised. As of now the BJP is merely taking its Congressisation to its logical end. It has given up on the unidimensional nationalist discourse, and started deciding its political strategy as per the caste realities generated by the preponderantly subaltern politics that currently rules the waves in UP.

Finally, we have a rude shock. Nationalism, we discover, has always been an alien concept for our society. The unifying homogenous discourse of nationalist history of freedom struggle invented by the Congress, and then followed more or less in the same way by the BJP, does not give a complete picture of the Indian historical reality.

The Congress undoubtedly accepted the presence of all anti-British struggles which lay outside its fold, but attributed to them the one and only uniform nationalist ideology it had managed to create. Not many people know that BR Ambedkar's demand for freedom from British rule was not because he wanted a free Indian nation state but because years of foreign rule had been unable to emancipate members of the lower caste.

Further back in history, the Wahabi sect, under the legendary leadership of Titu Mir, had not only fought the British but also the Hindus. The story of theological schools like Firangi Mahal and Deobandh, inspiring Pan Islamic sentiments in the pre-Independence era, is not a very well-known in Indian history either.

First the Congress, then the BJP. Their ideology of nationalism has egg on its face. Caste and subaltern politics, which cannot be articulated in terms of a state, have come to stay. The Congress tried to import the western paradigm of nationalism to our society, without realising that it had nothing in common with the various discourses being articulated by different groups in accordance with their respective aims. These goals overlapped at places but also had a uniqueness of their own.

Therefore, chaos will be our order unless people accept the fact that fragmentation is not a means but an end in itself for our polity. It is definitely not nation state, but then it is our system, our destiny.

Awakening of the Shudras

In the last 50 years there has been a tremendous awakening among the Shudras who form the vast majority of India's population. And in a democracy, where numbers matter most, it is quite obvious that the Shudras will dominate the political scene in future, writes AMIT KUSHARI

IN ancient India society was divided mainly into two parts — the Savaran Hindus and the Shudras. The first were mainly Brahmins (priests and teachers), Vaidyas (doctors), Kshatriyas and Rajputs (kings, warriors and soldiers), Kayasthas (clerks who worked in the courts), the Vaishyas and Mahajans (traders and shopkeepers). The second comprised farmers, cobblers, weavers, fishermen, butchers, milkmen and the like. In today's India the Shudras are known as Backward Classes, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

A large percentage of the Shudras and a small percentage of the Savaran Hindus later adopted Islam and Christianity. The Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Indian minorities belong to these groups. The population of India roughly comprises 66 per cent of the Shudras among whom the Backward Classes constitute 44 per cent, Scheduled Castes 15 per cent and Scheduled Tribes 7 per cent; 15 per cent of Muslims and Christians; and 19 per cent of the Savaran Hindus, including Brahmins, Rajputs, Mahajans, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains.

The Shudras, therefore, form a vast majority in modern India. If a large number of them had not embraced Islam or Christianity, they could have comprised 80 per cent of the population now. In a democracy, where numbers matter most, it is quite obvious that the Shudras will dominate the political scene in future. In the last 50 years of India's independence there has been a tremendous awakening among the Shudras and they have utilised the political power they can wield in future.

The awakening of the Backward Classes and Dalits began more than a century ago with the birth of great social reformers and revolutionary leaders. The Western education imparted by the British also accelerated the process of their liberation. But in the last 50 years, the political and social awakening that has been witnessed among the Shudras is nothing short of a phenomenon.

Gone are the days when the Shudras were treated as untouchables in ancient India who had very little human rights or dignity and were treated with utmost contempt by the Savaran Hindus. Time has now come for the Shudras to claim their due share.

The ancient scriptures mentioned that the Brahmins were born out of the head of God, the Rajputs from the arms and shoulders, the Mahajans from the belly and the Shudras from the feet. This accorded the lowest status to the Shudras who were to bear the burdens of society, especially the burdens of the higher classes. Society was so much dominated by the Brahmins that even the Shudras started believing that they were the most lowly creature created by God.

They were not allowed to enter temples or take water from the wells reserved for the higher classes. They were too scared to even protest. They were not allowed to seek higher education or wear the sacred thread. When a religious ceremony like Yajans or haven would take place, they were not allowed to come in the vicinity of the sacred fire so that the higher classes would not be polluted by their shadows.

They were allowed to wear clothes below their navel but were not allowed to cover the upper parts of their body. They were made to crawl by the roadside whenit a Brahmin passed by so that their unholy shadows did not pollute him. The Shudras could only make single-storeyed houses. If a higher caste Hindu hurtled a Shudra to his house for dinner, the guest was served food by the servants not in the presence of the host.

The Shudras had no right to learn the Hindu scriptures. If an intelligent Shudra child showed an interest to learn the Vedas or the Upanishads, he would be severely punished. If a Shudra boy fell in love with a Savaran Hindu girl, he would be burnt alive after tying him with a tree. Killing a Shudra was a minor offence, while killing a Hindu was a major one, especially killing a Brahmin was considered a heinous crime. Cow slaughter was considered a greater offence than killing a Shudra. A Shudra servant had no right over his own savings.

So heartless and rigid were the norms of ancient India that social and religious reforms have not been able to completely wipe out the evils of caste system in modern India. Even today the Shudras do not enjoy social equality with the Savaran Hindus. Though the modern laws and the Constitution of India prevent the upper classes to commit any barbaric act on the Shudras, stray incidents of casteism and barbarism do occur in states like Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.

In ancient India religious and social reformers like Gautama Buddha preached about the equality of man. Lord Buddha said a man's caste is determined by his actions and not by his birth. "The Shudra with good deeds could be equated with a Brahmin and a Brahmin with bad deeds could be equated with a Shudra." But even Lord Buddha could not completely abolish or criticise the caste system. In fact Lord Buddha, though in a mild form, believed in the caste divisions of Hindu society.

A Kshatriya disciple of Lord Buddha once complained to him that he was made to marry a girl who was introduced to him as a Kshatriya. But later the disciple found that the girl's mother was a Shudra and her father a Kshatriya. He felt deceived in the marriage and sought Lord Buddha's advice as to whether he could renounce his wife on the ground that her mother was a Shudra. Lord Buddha advised him not to do so since the father of the girl was a Kshatriya and could ignore the fact that her mother was a Shudra. He said, "the father's side is more important and you can, therefore, take the girl as a Kshatriya."

Lord Buddha, therefore, did not completely denounce the caste system. He also made an indirect hint that women were not equal to men by emphasising more on the father's lineage. This highlights another important issue that the women of ancient India were treated like the Shudras who did not have any human dignity or rights. The ancient Hindu law-maker, Manu, commented, Dhole, Ganwar, Shudra, Pashu, Nari — Yeh sab hain tarran key adhikari (drums, uneducated people, the Shudras, animals and women — all are fit to be thrashed).

We are fortunate to be born in a modern democratic India where human rights are protected by law. But we should not forget our dark past and should learn lessons from history. The Shudras who comprise 66 per cent of the population and women 50 per cent should no longer be oppressed or denied their basic rights. All Indians will have to change their mindsets drastically to prepare for a fully egalitarian social order. India now reserves 49.5 per cent of government jobs for the Shudras but this alone is not enough. More vigorous efforts will have to be made to cleanse the country from the filth of casteism and untouchability.

[Scene]

THE BOMBAY RUSH

From "Mumbai," by Suketu Mehta, in the Spring issue of Granta, *a special issue devoted to India. Mehta, who grew up in Bombay, now lives in New York City.*

Bombay is a city with an identity crisis, a city experiencing both a boom and a civic emergency. It's the biggest, fastest, richest city in India; by the year 2020, it is predicted, Bombay will be the largest city in the world. It held 12 million people at last count—more than Greece—and 38 percent of the nation's taxes are paid by its citizens. Yet half the population is homeless. In the Bayview Bar of the Oberoi Hotel you can order Dom Pérignon champagne for 20,250 rupees, more than one and a half times the average citizen's annual income, and this in a city where 40 percent of the houses are without safe drinking water. In a country where people still die of starvation, Bombay boasts 150 diet clinics. It's a city of glaring extremes and awesome divisions.

The manager of Bombay's suburban railway system was recently asked when the system would improve to a point where it could carry its 5 million daily passengers in comfort. "Not in my lifetime," he answered. Certainly, if you commute into Bombay, you are made aware of the precise temperature of the human body; it curls around you on all sides, adjusts itself to every curve of your own. A lover's embrace was never so close.

One morning I took the rush-hour train to the suburb of Jogeshwari. There was a crush of passengers, and I could get only halfway into the car. As the train gathered speed, I hung on to the top of the open door. I feared I would be pushed out, but someone reassured me: "Don't worry, if they push you out they will also pull you in."

I recently spoke to a man I know who has seen firsthand the slow destruction of the social fabric of the city. He is from Bhagalpur, in Bihar, site not only of some of the worst Hindu versus Muslim violence in the nation but also of a famous incident in 1980 in which the police blinded a group of criminals with knitting needles and acid. This man, more than most people I know, has seen humanity at its worst. I asked him if he felt pessimistic about the human race.

"Not at all," he replied. "Look at the hands from the trains."

If you are late for work in Bombay and reach the station just as the train is leaving the platform, you can run up to the packed compartments and find many hands unfolding outward from the train like petals, reaching out to pull you on board. As you run alongside you will be picked up, and some tiny space will be made for your feet at the edge of the open doorway. The rest is up to you; you will probably have to hang on to the door frame with your fingertips, taking care not to lean out too far lest you get decapitated by a pole placed close to the tracks. But consider what has happened: your fellow passengers, already packed tighter than the law allows cattle to be packed, their shirts drenched with sweat in the badly ventilated compartment, having stood like this for hours, retain an empathy for you, know that your boss might yell at you or cut your pay if you miss this train, and will make space for you where none exists. And at the moment of contact, they do not know if the hand that is reaching for theirs belongs to a Hindu or a Muslim or a Christian or a Brahmin or an Untouchable, or whether you were born in this city or arrived only this morning, or whether you live in Malabar Hill or Jogeshwari, whether you're from Bombay or New York. All they know is that you're trying to get to the city of gold, and that's enough. Come on board, they say. We'll adjust.

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A SECTION

MTV **Age Dawning** In **India**; Satellites Bring In Uninvited Guests

Steve Coll
Washington Post Foreign Service

College student Devasish Barua and his father, lawyer B.C. Barua, have been arguing volubly of late about the arrival in their middle-class South Delhi apartment of an uninvited, loud, charismatic foreign intruder.

Music Television, or MTV, the New York-based, 24-hour popular music channel featuring lingerie-clad rock nymphets, screaming guitars and rap singers who wear enough gold chains to anchor a ship, has beamed down into India, land of timeless ragas and glorified virginity. What the Baruas disagree about is whether the new channel - which leaks into their television reception from a nearby satellite booster - is a sign of progress or a harbinger of the end of civilization.

"MTV is a nuisance for the family and a hazard for the youngsters," said the elder Barua, who has not yet managed to stop his son from watching rock and rap videos but has at least persuaded him to quit break dancing in front of the television. "We said, 'This will spoil your health and you will die, also.' "

The commotion in the Barua household is only one conflict among many generated by the rapid proliferation of satellite dishes and nascent cable television technology in India. MTV is the latest in a series of foreign networks to join a chaotic, burgeoning revolution in communications here that is changing the way previously xenophobic India sees the rest of the world.

An estimated 400,000 Indian households now receive foreign programming by choice via satellite, up from a mere handful just two years ago. Others, like the Baruas, watch spillage from the satellite cable systems. The broadcasts generally reach apartments and houses on cables strung by unregulated cable operators who battle one another for territory - slashing their rivals' lines, sabotaging satellites and ratting to the police.

One New Delhi cable operator recently sent a circular to

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subscribers warning that a rival had tried to wreck his system by attaching an electrical current to the lines. "Two of our technicians were badly wounded," the cable operator reported, adding "with profound sorrow" that transmissions of satellite programming would be suspended until the battle with his rival operator was settled once and for all.

The governments of India and Pakistan also have begun fighting over satellite television. India has accused its longtime foe of using World Bank funds to rent a satellite transponder for the purpose of beaming propaganda broadcasts into India. The government says Pakistan first seduced Indian viewers with South Asian music videos on its satellite channel, then began to slip in news footage stolen from foreign broadcasters and accompanied by anti-Indian propaganda.

Proponents of the technology say that while it may have some rough edges, it is on the whole good for India. They argue that satellite broadcasting will push India toward integration with the global economy, consolidate its young, outward-looking, middle-class culture and hasten the end of traditional political thinking, which preaches that India must guard itself at all cost against foreign influences, lest they lead to exploitation of the country by foreign powers.

Rajiv Desai, spokesman in India for Hong-Kong based STAR-TV, a satellite company that beams MTV, the British Broadcasting Corp., sports, entertainment and other programming across Asia, said the advent of satellite broadcasts here marks "the dawning of a global consciousness" in India. The immediate effect, he said, will be to encourage demands among ordinary Indians for a government and economy that can deliver greater prosperity than the present, debt-bound socialist economy has been able to do.

"A lot of people are going to say, 'Hey, Singapore looks pretty good there [on the TV]. What am I doing in this rat hole?' " Desai said.

He said the impact will be especially strong on India's English-speaking, elite political class, which, he argued, has for years shielded its privileged status by espousing xenophobic socialist philosophy. "The English-speaking guy has always been the one who was the Fabian [socialist] jerk," Desai said. "Now, his children are going to say, 'I want to go to the Mediterranean, I want fast cars.' This will open up the world. I think it's great."

The Indian government is less impressed. "Our own social ethos, our cultural values - we would not like them to be subverted," said Mahesh Prasad, the government's secretary of information and broadcasting. Satellite television, he said, is "giving [poor

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people] dreams which cannot be fulfilled. It can create social tensions."

Such concerns have led the government in the past to ban advertising of such items as jewelry and baby food on the state-run television network for fear the ads will make viewers overwrought with greed. But Prasad, the government's senior television regulator, acknowledged that satellites and cable television networks are spreading in Indian cities much faster than the government can keep up with them. Asked about the impact of MTV, for example, Prasad said he had not yet watched the network.

"Things are happening by themselves, thick and fast," he said.

The Congress Party-led government of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, which is trying to open India's economy with a package of free-market economic reforms, "does not wish to turn its back on the advantages of technology," Prasad added. But the government would like "to bring about some kind of orderliness" and is considering several regulatory proposals.

In public statements, government officials suggest that whatever steps they take, they are inclined to bow to middle-class opinion, which seems to favor satellite television because of the variety of information and entertainment available from abroad.

Even lawyer Barua, despite the fights with his son over rock and rap videos, welcomes the new technology. "Satellite TV is very good, no doubt. There are so many programs you can get. . . . You can know what is going on all over the world." The only problem, Barua added, "is this MTV. This music, I don't think it is good for children."

But Barua's son said his father is lagging behind the times. "Most of my friends, they watch," said Devasish Barua. "In every house, they have their MTV."

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

NAMED PERSON: P.V. NARASIMHA RAO

ORGANIZATION: MUSIC TELEVISION; MTV

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HEADLINE: **MBA** Plus **MTV**: India's Yuppies Lead a Revolution

SERIES: Occasional

BYLINE: Molly Moore, Washington Post Foreign Service

DATELINE: NEW DELHI

BODY:

In a spartan office in one of the city's booming neighborhoods, five young, ambitious entrepreneurs are helping to shape India's future.

With pounding dance parties, high-tech laser shows and glitzy promotional extravaganzas, the recent business school graduates are taking advantage of economic reforms and Western-influenced consumerism that are revolutionizing job opportunities for India's newest generation of young professionals.

"We are riding the wave of a cultural revolution," said Samarjit Singh, 22, who has shunned his family business to help launch a pioneering marketing firm that has used innovative methods to promote Pepsi, Ray-Ban and a dozen other foreign and domestic companies. "I wouldn't have had the guts to try and do this five years ago. The opportunity didn't exist."

In a nation where the best and the brightest college graduates traditionally had two choices -- get a prized job in the government civil service or move out of India -- the upscale job market for the urban middle class is undergoing an unprecedented expansion. It has been driven by a government effort to radically overhaul India's socialist economy that has attracted scores of multinational corporations and privatized many of the country's stodgy government-run businesses.

Those dramatic changes, coupled with a sudden explosion in Western-inspired consumerism, are giving India's current class of college graduates the chance to earn more money, responsibility and power before they reach age 30 -- more than most of their middle-class parents earned in a lifetime.

"In the past, a boy studied engineering or medicine and went to America or a girl went into liberal arts, found a [government] service officer and got married. This was the middle-class dream," said Rajiv Desai, 44, who fled to the United States after graduation two decades ago but returned to open a successful public relations firm. "Today it is totally different."

Rishi Kumar, a 22-year-old political science student at a prestigious New

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Delhi college, plans to earn a business degree in the United States, but is quick to add: "I will come back to India for sure. India is opening up. The economy and the lifestyles are changing; the scope is widening for everybody. There is no limit to what I can do in India."

Economics major Amitav Virmani, 21, added, "There is a lot of money to be made here."

Those attitudes represent a major shift in the customary, pessimistic outlook of college graduates in this country of about 880 million, where competition for jobs is so fierce that each year 200,000 young people apply to take government civil service examinations to fill fewer than 100 job openings.

Young educated Indians not only have more variety in the choice of jobs they can pursue, but now have the opportunity to help launch sophisticated businesses that rarely existed in the old India, such as marketing, public relations, high finance and telecommunications.

"In the early '80s, the question was, 'Is there a job at all'?" said Vijay K. Thadani, director of India's largest chain of computer training schools, the National Institute of Information Technology. "Today it's taken for granted the job exists."

Although the Indian government has compiled no figures on the new professional jobs resulting from the economic liberalization, business leaders say tens of thousands of new positions have been created. Thadani said 50,000 new jobs have opened in computer fields alone in the last several years. Job counselors say that for every prospective business manager in India today there are 10 to 12 potential job openings.

It is not known just how many new jobs are becoming available, but the enormous growth in opportunity is reflected in the explosion of computer training schools. A decade ago, fewer than two dozen computer training schools existed in India. Today, more than 200 are in business. The largest, Thadani's institute, has ballooned from one center in Bombay with 99 students in 1982 to 73 centers with 60,000 students nationwide.

The new breed of young professionals has discovered that the expanding job market is transforming middle-class India's traditional view of work from the obligatory drudgery for survival to a search for personal achievement.

"More and more people are discovering it's more important to enjoy your work than just do your job," said Ritu Kaura, a 25-year-old senior management associate at Desai's public relations firm, Indian Public Affairs Network, which is associated with the U.S. public relations giant Hill and Knowlton.

Kaura, who often puts in 14-hour days for her clients, including MasterCard and Citibank, added, "My relatives always ask me, 'Why do you work so hard?' It's difficult for them to understand it gives me satisfaction. It's a challenge they haven't seen themselves."

Kaura is also part of the surge of young women entering the professional workplace in greater numbers than ever before. Thadani said the clientele of his firm's private computer training courses has reversed from overwhelmingly male

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to about 54 percent female since 1982 when the company opened.

"For a single girl in India, a parent's biggest worry is her safety," said Thadani. "For girls, computers are a very safe career. They are dealing with decent, educated people."

But many Indian business leaders, teachers and others say they also have observed a dangerous downside to the explosion of money, power and prestige that so many youngsters are achieving at such a young age.

"These kids are driven," said Desai, who interviews many of the city's brightest graduates. "They want everything here, today, now, gimme."

Top graduates starting in entry-level positions earn salaries of about $ 3,000 a year -- a small amount by Western standards, but 10 times the average per capita income for India. Those who get coveted jobs with multinational firms paying dollar-based salaries earn far more and are often given houses, cars and credit cards as bonuses.

Kanika Marwah, 33, a career guidance counselor at Delhi Public School, said the quest for money begins in high school. "They come to me and say they want to be in a field that will make them rich. They all want to pursue an **MBA** and go to work in a multinational company or an international bank. The 'I' has become the most important thing: 'I need this,' 'I need that,' and 'I don't care how I get it.' "

Having received steady diets of Western consumerism via satellite television's **MTV**, mass-market advertising and American programs such as "Dynasty," "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" and "The Bold and the Beautiful," students concede their values may be skewed.

"My generation is very money-minded," said Sonali Kumar, a 21-year-old college history student.

Even with the increase in job variety, India -- because of the sheer size of its population -- remains one of the most fiercely competitive nations in the world. The lure of new jobs has only increased the pressure on youths already under tremendous family and social strains to be successful.

"Things are changing too fast," said Avedesh Sharma, 38, a neuropsychiatrist who has seen a marked increase in mental problems and drug and alcohol abuse among his younger patients. "There are so many pressures, and they are being pulled in all directions. Kids in college no longer just study: They try to work in a business, learn computers or accounting to help them get better jobs. They feel they have to do it because everybody else is doing it."

The competition to get an edge in the marketplace has fueled extraordinary growth in computer training schools. A decade ago fewer than two dozen computer training schools existed in India. Today, more than 200 are in business. The largest, Thadani's institute, has ballooned from one center in Bombay with 99 students in 1982 to 73 centers with 60,000 students India-wide. The majority of students are pursuing the 18-month computer training program along with other full-time college studies, Thadani said.

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The Washington Post, February 18, 1994

The dramatic changes in the white-collar workplace, thus far, have been limited primarily to India's urban centers. And even the educated, middle-class students benefiting from the revolution express caution about the future.

"India is changing fast," said Mukul Krishna, 20, a third-year college science student. "But then it is still in its infancy stage. No one is really sure where all this will lead us."

GRAPHIC: PHOTO, RITU KAURA, 25, A PUBLIC RELATIONS EXECUTIVE, EPITOMIZES THE NEW ETHIC OF YOUNG PROFESSIONALS. MOLLY MOORE

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

COUNTRY: INDIA;

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HEADLINE: On **Ganges** Plain, Modernity Is Straining Tradition

SERIES: ONE VILLAGE IN INDIA - FIRST ARTICLE OF AN OCCASIONAL SERIES ABOUT TRANSITIONS IN RURAL LIFE IN INDIA

BYLINE: By STEVEN R. WEISMAN, Special to the New York Times

DATELINE: GURHA, India

BODY:

Life in this village and its surrounding green farmlands unfolds along the main road, where babies are born in a rudimentary health center not far from where the dead are carried to cremation grounds.

In the heat of late afternoon, the buzz of flies and pungent scent of smoke from dung fires cast a drowsy spell. Village men gather in pools of shade by the side of the road to sip sugary, milky tea and exchange gossip and complaints.

This year, the main complaint centers on the drought, the worst in memory, which has left half the rice paddies barren and doubled the price of potatoes and other produce at nearby bazaars. At the same time, corruption is everywhere, and young high school graduates cannot find jobs.

''It is true we have some advantages here,'' said Moinuddin Ahmed, the 35-year-old village headman. ''But the people are demanding more. They need help.''

About 580 million people, or one-seventh of the world's population, live in India's 560,000 villages, where traditions are strained every day by the gravitational pull of the modern world. The changes are subtle but profound. Although no single village can be called typical, behind Gurha's pastoral facade are the stresses of village life everywhere. Lying 300 miles southeast of New Delhi in the populous plains of the Ganges River and its tributaries, this community of 700 families is a microcosm of the challenges of adjusting Indian traditions to modern realities and aspirations.

The road through Gurha, paved only a few years ago, has itself brought change, progress and fresh problems.

New tea and cloth shops have opened, and people now dodge an occasional motorcycle as well as ox carts. But crime has increased, in part because of desperation from the drought. Outsiders rob villagers of a bag of grain or other valuables at gunpoint, using the road to make a quick getaway at night.

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The Young Leave,

Breaking Family Ties

Moreover, family ties are breaking as children leave in search of work. At Janata Higher Secondary School, where students attend class under a banyan tree, several schoolboys said they wanted to move to cities to be near hospitals, running water and movie theaters.

''Many of our students have a craze and a lust for a higher standard of living which can never be satisfied,'' said Jagdev Singh, the school principal. He recalled his shock two years ago when the unemployed son of a teacher at the school was involved in a train robbery.

Family after family in Gurha is experiencing the strain of a nationwide problem in India, the lack of jobs for educated young people who no longer want to plow a field or toil on family farms.

''I will go anywhere for work, but I can't find anything,'' said Amar Prakash, a 22-year-old graduate of a technical college in a nearby town.

Caste divisions, a phenomenon thousands of years old, remain much as they always were. That was clear five years ago, when Mr. Ahmed, a Moslem, championed the lower castes against some of the bigger landowners and became headman.

On one level, his victory in a predominantly Hindu community illustrated a spirit of religious harmony often found in small villages, if not in larger towns and cities. But in Gurha and elsewhere, Moslems are also often seen as people whose ancestors were lower-caste Hindus.

Most of Gurha's families are from lower castes, and retain their traditional distinctions as bamboo workers, blacksmiths, laundry workers and the like.

'Nobody Can Force Me

To Work on His Land'

Life in Gurha began changing dramatically in 1952, when India abolished large landholdings. The old feudal families then ceded much of their land to families who had long cultivated it on contract, and these families came to dominate the village.

Nowadays, most caste members have abandoned their traditional occupations and work at farming their land or the land of others. Some children from lowest castes are also attending school and demanding their rights.

''We used to be pushed around,'' said Sukh Lal, a 45-year-old lower-caste sharecropper wearing a tightly wrapped loincloth. ''Nobody can force me to work on his land.''

Other old rhythms have been disrupted by technology, even as many traditions remain.

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Gurha's families still rise before dawn and hitch their oxen to plow nearby fields while the earth is soft from the dew. Their only sanitary facilities are the nearby fields. Women still cook over cow dung fires in mud hearths and afterward scour their pots with mud and ash.

But under Government loans and grants, a few families have installed bio-gas generators, which use fresh cow dung fed into an underground chamber, producing gas to fire burners. Like two-thirds of India's villaages, Gurha now has electricity, although it is shut off for many hours of the day. Even so, 15 families have television sets.

Meanwhile, new fertilizers and seeds from a Government-subsidized cooperative store have made the land more productive. As elsewhere in the developing world, the better-off landlords have benefited, even if landless workers have not.

Chedda Lal, a balding landowner with stubbly gray whiskers, said he had mixed feelings about these changes.

A Withering

Of Solidarity Seen

''There is a new feeling of jealousy and envy,'' he said. ''Nobody is around who can command the respect of all the villagers. Everybody is out for himself. The solidarity that used to prevail in Indian society is withering away.''

The drought has inflicted special hardships, wiping out hopes for a good rice crop this year. The Government in New Delhi estimates that this region received half its normal rainfall this recent monsoon season.

The only families with crops are those living near irrigation canals built almost 40 years ago. Other villages have had to dig ditches and build roads for the Government for a dollar a day in cash or grain.

A mile from the center of Gurha, down a rutted and muddy road, lies a tiny cluster of mud huts known as Jorawar Khera, one of a dozen hamlets belonging to the village. Here, naked children play in the dust while adults complain of hunger in their families.

The men in this low-caste community say the wheat they harvested in May has almost run out, leaving enough for one meal a day of flat bread. Families also consume a leafy vegetable, harvested from ponds, that they cook in oil with a little salt.

People in Jorawar Khera complain that the roads in the surrounding low-lying areas are so bad that in the rainy season the hamlet becomes an island in a vast swamp. The richer landowners live close to canals and can afford the price, or the bribes, for irrigation.

''The rich people in Gurha have a vested interest in keeping us poor,'' said Raja Ram, a primary school teacher from the hamlet. ''If we had irrigation, we could work our own fields and not have to serve the others.''

Purna Masi, like many in Jorawar Khera, has had to look elsewhere for a livelihood. Leaving his family behind, he borrowed $4 for a train ticket to New

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Delhi, where he stayed with a friend and for two months worked pulling a bicycle rickshaw.

''I worked until I came down with a fever,'' he said. Sick and lonely in a strange big city, he returned home.

''At least here, I know everybody,'' he explained, adding proudly that the first thing he did was repay friends' loans.

Little Drought Relief

Reaches the Village

In the faraway capital, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi says India is spending more than $2.6 billion this year on drought relief. But in Gurha little relief had come as of early October.

V.N. Sachan, the chief village development officer, oversees the main drought relief programs for the state government of Uttar Pradesh.

On a recent afternoon, he was sitting outside his office, playing cards with friends. Later in the month, Mr. Sachan said, the money would come to pay for construction of 1,100 feet of road, enough to employ 250 people for five or six days. He agreed this was insufficient for Gurha's needs but argued that ''the drought has not been as severe as we initially thought.''

That comment provoked murmured arguments from the others at the card table, followed by a discussion of the extent of fraud in Government programs.

Everyone agreed that under a separate public works program, in which the Government hires private contractors who then employ poor workers, most of the money is pocketed by the middlemen. ''It's a golden opportunity for these fellows,'' Mr. Sachan said.

Indeed, to spend time in Gurha is to hear countless variations on the theme of corruption on the part of officials of one kind or another.

Villagers said that the police harass people to extract bribes, that some teachers take payoffs to allow students to cheat on their examinations, and that construction workers digging an irrigation canal were recently caught cheating by using mostly sand and no cement.

In another widely discussed case, the Government financed a dairy project a few years ago, subsidizing loans for cattle for low-caste farmers. But the farmers charged that when they sold their milk to the dairy cooperative, middlemen secretly adulterated it with water and refused to pay. As a result, the farmers' cattle loans went unpaid, and the program collapsed.

As always, there is another side to the story, this one told by Liqmal Ahmed, the village animal husbandry officer. He said the milk was never adulterated but was of poor quality because the cows were never fed properly. ''If children here are undernourished, how can we expect cattle to be different?'' he asked.

In the Jorawar Khera hamlet, resentment seemed focused on a nearby ravine,

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which was recently deepened by the Government to drain off the floodwaters. That well-intentioned act backfired, however, because now the ravine forms a wide river blocking access to grazing lands for cattle.

The theme of good intentions gone awry is another constant here. One case is the irrigation canals, credited with making some of the land more productive.

Villagers say that the canals were never properly sealed, and that because Gurha has no drainage system, water seepage has turned many places into swamps. Water-logging has also drawn salt up from the lower depths of soil, ruining nearby wells and creating large sandy splotches that have spoiled once-productive fields.

Older villagers remember when Gurha used to be blessed with thick groves of mango trees. The groves are gone now, killed by soil salinization.

Mr. Ahmed, the headman, said his main priority now is to build new drainage systems to rescue farm fields and keep the village's dirt lanes from turning into rivers of mud.

''Everyone is always asking me to get this done,'' he said. ''But what can I do by myself without help from the Government?''

GRAPHIC: Photos of a farmer, village and a road in Gurha (NYT/Steven R. Weisman); map of India showing location of Gurrha (NYT)

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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May 24, 1995, Wednesday, Final Edition

SECTION: A SECTION; Pg. A27

LENGTH: 1384 words

HEADLINE: **Early To Wed;** Still Common in Rural India, Child Weddings Highlight Clash Between Tradition and Today

BYLINE: John Ward Anderson, Washington Post Foreign Service

DATELINE: BALI, India

BODY:

Sumitra Jogi cried at her wedding, but not for the usual reasons. Dressed in a pink smock, the bride -- an 11-month-old who is still breast-feeding -- was married to a 6-year-old boy in a secret, midnight ceremony in this remote desert village.

As Sumitra's father smiled approvingly, the baby's mother recited her daughter's vows while cradling the sleepy infant in her arms. Then the groom, bedecked in a red-and-gold turban, clasped Sumitra's hand and, with her mother carrying her, led his bride 3 1/2 times around a sacred fire, their first steps together as husband and wife.

Government officials and social activists estimate that hundreds and possibly thousands of such illegal child marriages were performed in India's western state of Rajasthan on May 2, which, according to the Hindu religion, was a particularly favorable date for matrimony. Like many of those children, Sumitra was married in a joint ceremony; she and her 12- and 16-year-old sisters were wed to three brothers, aged 6, 14 and 17, from a nearby village.

"In rural Rajasthan, all the girls are married by age 14," said Ratankatyayani, an attorney and director of a social welfare group called the Mukti Dhara Sansthan. "These are poor, illiterate families, and they don't want to keep their girls past their first menstrual cycle."

Experts say that child marriages are on the decline in most urban areas, where families are more affluent and laws prohibiting weddings of children under age 18 are easier to enforce. But in rural communities on the sidelines of India's free-market reforms and modernization efforts, child marriages are still common.

Families cite social and economic reasons. The younger the bride, the smaller the dowry demanded, they say. They also believe that marrying off a daughter early in life reduces the chance that her honor will be spoiled before she can be paired with a suitable husband.

According to the most recent government statistics, the mean age of a bride

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in Rajasthan is 16, and about 18 percent of girls between ages 10 and 14 are married. In some rural districts, however, as many as half the girls in the 10-to-14 age group are married, according to a 1991 study by the state's Department of Women and Child Development.

Social activists who work in the urban areas of Rajasthan said that regardless of when girls are married they do not move in with their husband and in-laws until age 16 or 17. The marriage, they said, is essentially a binding social contract between two families, requiring that their children be mates for life. But, they said, the girl does not join her husband until after a second ceremony, which is usually held years later.

There is intense disagreement among social workers about how to prevent child marriages and whether they are a serious problem or simply a misunderstood cultural phenomenon that has been sensationalized by the media.

Some say child marriages have a debilitating impact on young people, particularly girls, thrusting them into early motherhood and beginning a dangerous downward health spiral for them and their babies. Even though many of the young couples don't live together until age 16 or 17, they often are pulled out of school immediately after marriage and put to work full time, stunting their potential and depriving them of any control they may have had over their lives.

"The girls are afraid, and they don't know what a physical relationship entails," said Abha Sharma of the Rajasthan government's Project for Adolescent Girls. "They are so horrified and confused that when they come home for a few days they are scared of going back to their in-laws."

Others say such criticism is short-sighted. "It's very convenient for the government to say it's bad and to pass laws against it, but have they come and engaged in dialogue to find out why it's happening? No," said Asha Dixit, director of a social action group called the Society for Women's Awakening. "They don't understand the problems, and they don't come up with solutions."

Instead of alienating uneducated, tribal people with condemnation of a centuries-old tradition, Dixit and others prefer programs that attack what they see as the underlying causes of child marriages: the low status of women, poverty and illiteracy, which is as high as 95 percent among women in rural Rajasthan, according to some estimates.

"There is no child marriage in the urban areas or where there has been upward economic mobility," said Sharda Jain, an official of Sadan Research Center, an organization in Jaipur, the Rajasthani capital, that specializes in education issues. "The moment people are well-off, they don't marry off their children."

The debate among social workers and government officials doesn't seem to concern the people of Bali and other rural Rajasthanis, who have been arranging marriages between children for generations.

"The marriages [of Sumitra's sisters] were fixed three years ago," said Lakshmi, grandmother of the three brides in this tiny village of hand pumps and gas lanterns. After Sumitra was born, the parents of the two families agreed that since each had a third single child they would simply add another marriage

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to the planned ceremony.

"If we do separate marriages, each marriage will become very expensive. But when you do it together, into the same family, you save money," the grandmother said.

"A daughter's marriage is a big problem," added Harigi Jogi, the girls' father, who said the triple wedding cost him the equivalent of $ 650 -- about 20 months of his family's wages. Much of the money went for the traditional wedding feast for all 150 residents of the village, a tiny farming hamlet about 150 miles southwest of New Delhi where Jogi's family has lived for nine generations.

Preparations continued throughout the day, as villagers erected colorful tents, tested a portable sound system that blared music from popular Hindi movies and cooked village fare in large brass pots. The brides' house was freshly painted with yellow, green and blue peacocks and lotus petals.

Elders from nearby communities lounged on rope beds in the shade and debated whether to allow outsiders, particularly a Western reporter, to attend the wedding. The family was particularly concerned that the ceremony might be stopped by teams of police and social workers who were roving around Rajasthan trying to stop child marriages.

Elders and the family denied that a baby was to be married, although children in the village continued to whisper about "the little one." It was unclear whether a third ceremony was planned until the very end, when Sumitra's mother approached the sacred fire and sat cross-legged next to the groom, revealing a tiny baby wrapped in the folds of her bright red sari.

Sumitra slept through most of the ceremony, while the groom's brother-in-law huddled behind him and coaxed him through the motions.

Ratankatyayani said Sumitra would probably remain at home until about age 8, when she would be sent to her in-laws' house, where her older sisters would act as her guardians. In such cases, according to experts, there is intense pressure for the young brides to begin sexual relations at very early ages.

Murti Jogi, Sumitra's 12-year-old sister, said a few hours before her wedding that she had not met her future husband, 14-year-old Ramesh. Nonetheless, both she and her older sister, Koeli, neither of whom has ever been to school, said they would begin living with their new husbands immediately.

Sixty miles away in a small town outside Jaipur, about a dozen women who were married as children said they had no regrets because it was the only life they had known. However, they did not think the practice should be continued in modern India.

Asked their age at marriage, the women held their hands above the floor to show their heights. Only two said they could recall their weddings -- one remembered the sweets, the other the dancing.

"We all got married in our mother's arms," said Sundar, now about 65. "It's not as though anybody asked us if we wanted to get married. Our parents just did it. . . . Now times have changed, so you should wait until the girls are ready."

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The Washington Post, May 24, 1995

Special correspondent Rama Lakshmi contributed to this report.

GRAPHIC: Photo, john ward anderson; Illustration, larry fogel, Two 16-year-olds, sitting at center, exchange wedding vows in rural western India, where child weddings are common despite laws against them. THE CHILD BRIDES OF INDIA While child marriages are on the decline in most urban areas, they remain popular -- though illegal -- in rural communities. "It does affect your health because you take on more responsi-bility early in life -- cooking the food, getting the wood, working in the fields. It makes you very weak early in life." -- Kali Mangal, child bride now about 60 years old. In the western state of Rajasthan: MARRIED YOUNG *The mean age of a woman at marriage is 16 years. *About 18 percent of girls between ages 10 and 14 are married. *Girls as young as 8 are compelled to live with their husbands' families because extra hands are needed in the fields and because the girl's parents want to be relieved of the burden of raising a daughter they believe is no longer theirs. * CHILD MOTHERS Early marriage usually means early motherhood, which leads to higher birth and mortality rates and contributes to higher illiteracy rates. * Eighty percent of births are attended by untrained midwives and relatives. * The typical woman bears 4.8 children. * One in 10 children dies before the baby's first birthday. * Illiteracy is estimated to be as high as 95 percent for women. SOURCE: Indian government 18%

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: May 24, 1995

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October 8, 1994, Saturday, Final Edition

SECTION: STYLE; PAGE C1

LENGTH: 2023 words

HEADLINE: Changing **India, Wedded to Tradition;**
Arranged Marriages Persist With '90s Twists

SERIES: Occasional

BYLINE: Molly Moore, Washington Post Foreign Service

DATELINE: NEW DELHI

BODY:

For private detective Subhash Wadhawan, it began as an elementary pre-matrimonial investigation: A New Delhi family hired him to check the credentials of a New York hotel manager they'd chosen to marry their daughter through a classified advertisement in an Indian newspaper.

Wadhawan flew to New York, checked into the hotel and asked for the prospective groom. When the investigator answered the knock at his door a few minutes later, a smiling Indian bellboy stood before him. "You called for me, sir?"

"I was shocked," said the 51-year-old Sherlock Holmes of New Delhi's premarital investigative industry. "This boy told my client he was the senior manager. He wasn't even the assistant manager. He was a bellboy! His salary was peanuts, and his social status was nothing."

Welcome to Indian matchmaking, 1990s style. In a society that is becoming increasingly mobile, more urbanized and better educated, the centuries-old science of arranging marriages is undergoing a dramatic metamorphosis.

With more families migrating from the familiar social circles of ancestral villages to anonymous urban centers, classified ads have replaced parental networks, professional matchmakers have supplanted socially connected relatives, and detective agencies have overtaken village word-of-mouth to verify family backgrounds.

Although the vast majority of Indian marriages continue to be arranged by parents, Westernized "love" marriages are on the rise. And even within the more prevalent arranged marriages, improving levels of education among the middle class and the unprecedented number of women entering the professional work force are giving young people more control over their matrimonial destinies than ever before.

"Indian society is in the midst of a social transition," Suman Jain of New

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Delhi's Lakshmi Bai College wrote in a new study of young women's attitudes about marriage. "With the spread of education and westernization of society, change is taking place in the family and in social customs. No institution has shown more change and strain than the system of marriage."

"My father and mother got married after meeting only once," said Rajesh Khanna, 31, who runs the New Delhi franchise of an international company. "A lot of my generation would laugh that off completely today. In urban areas, things have changed. You're exposed to more people, you interact outside the family more freely. It enables us to judge for ourselves who would make a good life partner. Now we believe in 'semi-arranged' marriages."

That means parents still conduct the search for marriage candidates, and most decisions are made after one stiff, formal meeting between the man and woman and their families. But today, in most middle-class families, the children do have final veto power over the choice and are allowed to date their future spouses between the engagement and the **wedding** -- a development unheard of less than a generation ago and one that hasn't moved into the country's rural villages.

In Khanna's case, his parents and friends set up meetings with nearly 15 women before he met one he agreed to marry.

"I found in her a balance of everything I wanted -- education, family background, looks and personality," said Khanna, who decided to marry 26-year-old Arti Sayal during their first meeting at a New Delhi coffee shop.

Love? "The attraction was there," said Khanna, adding matter-of-factly, "In a semi-arranged marriage, there is no question of love."

That is perhaps the single greatest distinction between choosing a mate in **India** and selecting a spouse in Western societies: Love and romance are not factors. And even the most successful middle-class, career-oriented young men and women say they would rather trust their parents than their own judgment when it comes to sifting through marriage candidates. In the Lakshmi Bai College study, 82 percent of all female students surveyed said marriages arranged by parents with the consent of the daughter was their preferred mode of matrimony. Almost half opposed courtship before marriage.

"My parents are fussier than I am," said Ritu Chawla, 26, senior management associate at a New Delhi public relations firm who recently married a U.S.-educated financial consultant suggested by her parents. "I knew they would get a better boy than I could find."

The Impersonal Ads

"Match for 24-year-old Delhiite, fair complexion, Punjabi Khatri girl, post graduate (English) modern outlook with traditional values."

"Parents of extremely beautiful, very fair, homely, talented Hindu Khatri girl, 21, MA fine arts, invite correspondence from smart, highly educated officer or professional status businessman from highly placed family. Only cultured, respected, educated and well-placed families need correspond."

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The matrimonial advertisements that fill pages of the urban Sunday newspapers offer a window into the changing demands of a new generation and their families.

"The girl must be elegantly beautiful and fair," said Krishan Kumar Pathak, 50, one of **India's** best-known professional marriage counselors. "But now education comes first. They want an educated professional."

Pradeep Guha, advertising director for the Times of **India**, said the role of the ads is, in itself, a reflection of changing society. The number of ads -- which run by the thousands every week -- has doubled in the past decade.

"The more cosmopolitan the society gets, the more impersonal it gets," said Guha. "Newspapers have replaced the intermediary aunt and the intermediary pundit [family priest]."

The matrimonial advertisements in **India's** big-city dailies are a far-distant cousin of the "personals" carried by U.S. newspapers. In **India**, the advertisement is not the beginning of a potential romance but the starting point of a business and family merger. For an Indian couple, practical considerations are paramount.

"Before, the girl or boy was found within the family and you knew the social background," said Subhash Wadhawan, who has seen pre-matrimonial investigations explode from a handful of cases 15 years ago to about half of his detective agency's business today. "Now in metropolitan cities you don't know who is who. Nobody wants to take chance. Once you are married in **India**, it's very difficult to get a divorce."

His investigations focus primarily on family, social and financial backgrounds. Frequently he accompanies his clients on their initial visit with a prospective spouse. Usually the two families have met through advertisements and know nothing more about each other than the cryptic printed descriptions.

That initial meeting invariably determines whether a marriage will take place. Wadhawan said his client families usually have such an emotional investment in making a good impression, they are fearful of tough questions about family finances and backgrounds.

That's where Wadhawan steps in, posing as an interested uncle accompanying the family on its search. "I can afford to put the penetrating questions to them," he said. But it's not the answers that give him his most valuable insights. It's his trip to the bathroom. "You can read lot about a family by visiting their toilet," he said.

Make Me a Match

Somewhere between the impersonal lines of a classified ad and the snooping of detectives are the urban families fed up with the time-consuming task of combing through hundreds of replies and checking family backgrounds.

That's when professional matchmakers like Krishan Kumar Pathak enter the picture. "They've been through the bazaar shopping around," he said. "Ads cause

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a lot of problems for people [because] they exaggerate. The family has to do all the legwork. If they haven't found any success, they come to us, exhausted and desperate. They know we've already checked. We give them a ready-made picture."

First consultation is 50 rupees, about $ 1.60. A full-scale search can cost up to $ 60 or more if the candidate is an Indian living abroad.

Pathak, 50, will not only provide pictures of potential brides and grooms, but videotapes as well. It saves time -- and humiliation: "The girl doesn't even know she's been rejected."

He and his wife, Neelam, also make family visits to check the appearance, personality and background of each candidate. "After meeting the girl, we meet with the boy's mother to see her temperament," said Pathak. "The main wars will take place between the wife and the mother-in-law. We make sure they are compatible." He also advises parents and their children on how to behave during the formal interview meetings between families.

"If a girl is outgoing and talks a lot, that is a minus point," said Pathak. "Boys want Indian girls to be shy like a cow. I tell the parents, from a business point of view, tell the girl if she wants to get married to keep her mouth reasonably shut -- but not completely shut; otherwise the boy will reject her because he says she's deaf and dumb."

'Less Dangerous This Way'

"I was brought up to be a virgin, to marry who your parents want," said Vinita Dhoundiyal, an outgoing 27-year-old college lecturer. "But when I was 18, I told my parents I wanted to choose my husband myself. I resisted all of this."

Like many of her generation, Dhoundiyal is torn between the lure of modern, Western ideals and the pull of Indian **tradition** and culture.

When her mother placed advertisements in the newspapers for a match, Dhoundiyal tore up the replies. She refused to meet men recommended by her relatives. But on a sweltering night in July, she married a man her mother found through a newspaper advertisement.

Her friends who shared her passion for feminist literature and modern thinking "see me as somebody who didn't have the courage to stick it out; they see me as somebody who compromised," said Dhoundiyal.

Eager to find a husband on her own, perhaps even find a man she loved, Dhoundiyal was fettered by a cultural stigma that considers dating and even the most innocent premarital contact with men unacceptable.

And family pressures to consent to an arranged marriage were immense. "They say, 'You're 27, you're ancient. You're not that good-looking. You don't know how to cook.' Everything is wrong with you. You're fighting a losing battle."

Finally she agreed to meet several men selected by her family. In the end, she said, "I was a bit of a coward. ... It's less dangerous this way."

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The meetings in her family living room with the prospective grooms and their families felt forced and uncomfortable. "It was so humiliating," said Dhoundiyal. "The things they valued were all the things I wasn't: I'm not domestic, I have outside interests. Bridegrooms were looking for the opposite of me."

She spotted their disappointment the minute they walked in the door. "They'd see my mother -- pretty, glowing, the ideal kind of Indian woman. Then they'd see me and I could see the letdown in their eyes."

She agreed to marry the third candidate she met, 33-year-old Amitabh Bhatnagar, because -- in the few minutes their families allowed them to chat in private -- he expressed strong encouragement for her studies, career and intellectual pursuits.

They lived in different towns and never dated before they were married five months later. A few weeks before her **wedding,** Dhoundiyal confided, "I don't have a sense of who he is -- he's not even totally a friend yet."

The two were married in a lavish traditional Hindi **wedding** ceremony, and now Dhoundiyal leads a double life. In New Delhi she exemplifies the modern Indian career woman -- in outlook, attitude and dress. But on weekends, as the train draws closer to Lucknow, where she visits her husband's family, Dhoundiyal pulls a veil over her face and slips rows of bangles on her arms, rings on her toes and bracelets on her ankles -- the accouterments of the proper Indian bride -- and kisses the feet of her in-laws when she enters their home.

"I don't feel a conflict," she said. "They are supportive of my job. This is my way of reassuring them I'm not going to break up the family."

She paused. "I didn't marry for love. I married the family."

GRAPHIC: PHOTO, MATCHMAKER KRISHAN KUMAR PATHAK (WITH WIFE NEELAM): "THE MAIN WARS WILL TAKE PLACE BETWEEN THE WIFE AND THE MOTHER-IN-LAW. WE MAKE SURE THEY ARE COMPATIBLE.", MOLLY MOORE

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

COUNTRY: **INDIA;**

LOAD-DATE: October 8, 1994

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August 2, 1994, Tuesday, Final Edition

SECTION: STYLE; PAGE F1

LENGTH: 1667 words

HEADLINE: **India's Lewd** Awakening;
MTV & the Film Industry Are Putting Sexy Lyrics on Everyone's Lips

SERIES: Occasional

BYLINE: Molly Moore, Washington Post Foreign Service

DATELINE: NEW DELHI

BODY:

I have blue eyes,

What shall I do?

I have red lips,

What shall I do?

Sexy, sexy ...

People call me sexy.

-- From a Hindi film song

All of India is in an uproar over sex.

Sex in film songs, that is.

Mothers of young children are angry. Women's organizations are outraged. Moviemakers are up in arms. The prime minister is fuming. The government censor board is wringing its collective hands. And the music shop salesmen are making a killing.

"My sales have doubled because of these vulgar songs," boasted 25-year-old Dharmendra Mehra, who runs Welcome Audio-Video in one of New Delhi's busiest shopping districts. His hottest seller is a cassette of the best of the lewd and crude called "With the Lover."

The culture that brought the world the Kamasutra and the film industry that can't seem to make a movie that doesn't include a rape scene have become obsessed by the wave of gyrating hips, pelvic thrusts, steamy kisses and bawdy

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lyrics that has swept through its movie and music productions in recent months. The emotional controversy over the surge of vulgarity in the entertainment business is India's latest episode of cultural angst as it struggles to open its economy and its society to greater Western influences while trying to preserve its own traditions and social mores.

"Our society is going through a massive transitional phase," said Ranjana Kumari, director of New Delhi's Center for Social Research. "Things are changing too suddenly, and we're not prepared."

Certainly nothing prepared India for the clash of East meeting West in the revolution that has exploded on India's silver screens and pop radio stations in the last year. In a country where it's taboo for men and women to touch in public, now preschool kids are prancing around their houses singing the shocking (to Indian sensibilities) "Sexy, sexy" song.

It all started with MTV, which one Delhi newspaper columnist recently compared to "termites eating away at our own traditional values." MTV was first beamed to India via the Hong Kong satellite channel STAR-TV more than three years ago. And its arrival changed the face of entertainment here.

MTV put visuals to American music, which had long been popular among India's middle class and younger generation. But its greatest impact was spreading Western music and attitudes beyond the big cities of Bombay-and New Delhi to small towns across the country, where savvy television shop owners began buying cheap satellite dishes and stringing cable wires to village huts for a few rupees a month.

Also, for the first time in modern Indian entertainment history, audiences had an alternative to indigenous film productions and the staid government-controlled television network Doordarshan, snidely referred to by one television critic as "the last upholder of middle-class morality" in India. Even in the poorest of the poor slums, neighbors began pooling their rupees to rent televisions and began watching cable movies rather than going to theaters.

If the conservative politicians and pundits viewed MTV as a termite eating away at Indian values, a nervous Bollywood -- the world's biggest film industry, which churns out more than 1,000 flicks a year -- saw MTV eating away at its market and its profits. So Bollywood, whose show tunes dominate the music industry charts, decided to fight back.

Filmmaker Subhash Ghai's first blow was a knockout punch that transformed the movie industry almost overnight.

"The Villain," released last year, starred the country's top actor and actress. Like all Hindi movies, it included dance scenes set to music. But one dance scene was unlike anything that had ever made it past the government censor boards and onto the silver screen.

In a song that scaled the pop charts, the leading lady is asked, "What's beneath the blouse?" The camera skips over her demurely veiled face and focuses suggestively on the choli stretched tight across her ample, heaving bosom as she replies, coyly, "In the choli is my heart, and this heart I will give to my lover."

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Those two lines packed the theaters. Those two lines resulted in record music sales. Those two lines changed the Indian movie industry.

"Choli" was still on the charts when the so-called "Sexy, sexy" hit the streets with a disco beat that repeated the word "sexy" more than 100 times. Then came the movie "Raja Babu" and the refrain "Drag your cot next to mine." And "Vijaypath" ("The Road to Victory"), with its double-entendre play on a cricket match and sex: "First ball broke my bangles, slipped my skirt, very strong his ball was, with full speed." Followed by "Andaaz" ("Style"), with the heroine crooning, "I am a goods train, give me a push." All of which were accompanied by never-before-used camera shots of once-private body parts.

India went ballistic. Every cab driver in Bombay was singing "Sexy, sexy." The radios played "Choli" ad nauseam. Conservative politicians and women's organizations were furious. Lawyers sued movie studios in an effort to shut down what they considered vulgar films. About 150 members of the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stormed a theater in Bombay a few months ago, throwing black ink on the screen, ripping up marquees and chasing patrons out.

In a parliamentary debate on the shocking trends, both ruling and opposition party members joined in raucous chants of "Shame! Shame! Shame!" during a grilling of the senior minister who oversees the government film censor board.

It all may sound pretty tame by Western standards, but the scenes and the songs are lascivious by Indian norms. Previously, sex was portrayed behind veils of verbal and visual illusion, leaving the rest to the imagination. (Even the required rape scene in most Hindi movies didn't show the act. The camera cut from the menacing leer of the villain to the sobbing face of the victim, leaving out the body contact.)

"I had one dirty song, and I never meant to encourage vulgarity," said a now repentant Ghai. "But it became a precedent. It was like a fashion. Anything that's a hit, the rest of the producers try to copy and imitate it."

Across India, the response has been thunderous.

Subhadra Gupta, 34-year-old steel company executive and mother of two children, watched what she considered an appalling transformation in her 4-year-old son, Varun.

"My son has forgotten all the nursery rhymes he learned," said a distraught Gupta. "He used to come home from preschool and sing 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.' Now you tell him to recite a nursery rhyme and he makes a face, says, 'No, no' ... and starts singing 'Choli' and 'Sexy, sexy.'

"I am scared that in a year, when he is ready to go to school, during the school interview if they ask him to sing a song he might just start off with these film songs, and they will chuck him out," said Gupta.

Leaders of women's organizations charge that the new trend is even more denigrating to women than the violence and stereotypes to which actresses are normally subjected in Indian films.

"Since the advent of STAR-TV and MTV into India, women have been portrayed

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more and more as a commodity," said Ranjana Kumari. "It's a symptom of a growing market economy where everything, everybody has become a commodity."

The ire is not limited to mothers and women's organizations. More and more studies are being published indicating that crimes against women and "Eve-teasing," a euphemism for sexual harassment, are increasing significantly throughout India, particularly in urban areas. And many people say much of the blame falls on Bollywood, where not only sex, but violence, is commanding greater chunks of footage. "Mainstream cinema is being shamelessly imbued with innuendo and vulgarity, which is threatening to strike at the very core of our culture," wrote Shashi Ranjan, president of the conservative BJP, in letters of protest to the government censor board and the Indian Motion Picture Producers' Association.

Even Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao has gotten into the act, recently telling a meeting of state information and cinematography ministers, "Self-regulation is the best antidote, but in case it fails to work, we will certainly have to fall back on other measures."

Most moviemakers interpret "other measures" to mean tougher censorship.

Mahesh Bhatt, one of Bollywood's most successful filmmakers, said India's approach to the entire issue is full of contradictions. India says it wants an open market, yet it wants to censor what Michael Jackson does onstage, he lamented. And as for criticizing sexuality on the screen, he harked back to India's far less inhibited cultural past: "Every temple in India has images of the worst imaginable sex postures."

Although Indian films are technically subjected to review by a government censor board, members of the movie industry often sit on the board. Critics also complain that the board's guidelines are subjective and its members less than diligent.

Subhash Ghai, who made "The Villain" and is a member of the board, asked, "We need censors, but who's going to be the censor?

"At the board they say, 'Look, what are the guidelines? What is aesthetic? What's vulgar?' " he said of his colleagues. "One member is an intellectual, the other is a social worker with limited education. They're paid $ 1 a day. They come watch some movies and sleep for a few hours in the afternoon."

And even if the censor board deletes a scene or a song, local theaters routinely splice the banned footage back into the film. The government is now considering creating a special police force to raid theaters and arrest owners and distributors who are showing censored bites.

But Ghai and others say there are no easy solutions.

"The problem is constantly arising because of confusion in outlook and belief," he said. "In belief, people want Indian. In outlook, they want West."

Washington Post foreign correspondent John Ward Anderson contributed to this article from Bombay.

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